Thillai Govindan:

A Posthumous Autobiography.

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EDITED BY
"PAMBA."

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THILLAI GOVINDAN:

A POSTHUMOUS AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

"..... By your gracious patience,
I shall a round, unvarnish'd tale deliver
Of my whole course of *life*."—SHAKESPEARE.

EDITED BY

"PAMBA."

OFFICE OF THE REGISTRAR OF BOOKS
REGISTERED
27 NOV 1903
MADRAS.

FIRST EDITION.

Madras:
SRINIVASA, VARADACHARI & CO.

1903.

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MOUNT ROAD—22-9-1903.

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EDITOR'S NOTE.

THE grief of my friend's early and sudden death is yet green in my memory and my heart yearns for the touch of a vanished hand and the sound of a voice that is still. In outward speech, he was a blunt man; and in his sarcastic moods, a barbed and nasty companion. But under it all there was a heart of sterling gold, overflowing with human kindness and sympathy. He had ever a ready tear and an open purse for the suffering and the needy and his self-forgetting charity often placed him in unenviable predicaments. To me it is not strange that he is quite silent on this point in his book; for he was always touchy about it and resented all allusions to it. Knowing him so intimately as I do, I find he has done much injustice to himself and has brought out his failings more forcibly than his many virtues. He seems to have depicted his countrymen too in the same manner. Whether this is owing to any innate obliquity of vision in him or whether the facts are as stated here, it is outside the province of a mere editor to determine, though

I have thought it my duty to call attention to it. Agreeable to my friend's wish, I have veiled my name under the ingenious sobriquet coined for me by him; and in the following pages, the explanatory foot-notes alone are mine. I have also placed the last chapter of the manuscript first, by way of an introduction.

PAMBA.

LAST WORDS.[1]

I feel the iron hand of death upon my heart; his cold fingers are steadily tightening their grip. Not many more days, perhaps not many more hours, I may yet breathe in this world. The glory of the sun and stars, the freshness of the fields and groves, the music of the birds and brooks, and dearer than all these, the long-familiar faces and voices of those who have put their lumps of sugar into my life-cup, I shall soon cease to see and hear. But I do not regret it nor do I fear to face the change. It must come to us all one day and for not a few of us, the earlier that day the better. And glancing over these pages for the last time, this round, unvarnished tale of my whole course of life, I seem to feel the utter vanity of it all. On the very verge of earthly existence, at the dark threshold of death, I stand alone at this moment and think till love and fame and all the joys and woes of this world sink to mere nothingness. And so let this be, for all seems as nothing, the great as well as the small.

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1 Chapter the Twentieth of the original MSS. Ed.

No cheeks of mine can burn with shame or glow with pride at the result hereof; but nevertheless, I request my friends who might easily find me out from the incidents related in this, to put a seal on their lips, lest the finger of curiosity should vexingly point at the surviving dear ones.

To the life-long friend who is to edit these memoirs after me, I have to say a few words in conclusion: Whenever in these pages he meets with anything in my life hitherto unknown to him, let him not think harshly of me; but rather remember how Thackeray spoke of us all as so many isolated islands, with each a separate world within his hat. Further, let him not change in any way or add to what I have written. Let him merely print and publish these sheets with the utmost secrecy, meeting the costs of the publication from the money bequeathed to him for the purpose in my will. Reader and Editor! Farewell till we meet again elsewhere and I pray you think of me kindly.

T. G.

THILLAI GOVINDAN:

A POSTHUMOUS AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

Chapter the First.

WHEREIN MY PAIN AND GRIEF CAUSE JOY AND SATISFACTION TO OTHERS.

THE village of Thillai lies in the Tamil country. It has two temples, one dedicated to Siva[1] and the other to Vishnu.[1] From time immemorial, its Brahmin street of about fifty houses has never been trodden by the polluting feet of a Pariah,[2] a Pullah[2] or a Shanan,[2] and the hundred and odd Sudra[3] houses in the village are at a respectful distance from this holy abode of the twice-born.[4] Like most Indian villages, Thillai is mainly agricultural; and as in most Indian

1 Two of the gods of the Hindu 'Trimurti'; the third, Brahma, is not ordinarily worshipped in temples. Ed.

2 Some of the 'lowest' castes; probably the aborigines of the land. Ed.

3 The last of the four main castes; now, a very mixed one. Ed.

4 The Brahmins, the Kshathryas and the Vaisyas are so known; here, the Brahmins. Ed.

villages, not a single Brahmin in it defilés his hands with any labour and but a few of the Sudras are directly engaged in the cultivation of the soil. All that dirty work is done by the low-caste beings named above and the Brahmin or the Vellala[1] land-lord sits at home consuming the rich harvests of his lands, brought by the poor toiler to the very end of his street or his threshold, according to his caste. The soil, though rich and fertile, has a mighty task to perform: for, out of its produce have to be met the heavy tax due to the State; the ordinary and the extraordinary expenses of the land-lord and his numerous joint family even to the third degree of affinity; the expenses of the village guardsmen[2] and their families, who protect the harvest and the land-lord's property by kindly desisting from robbery; the annual quota to the village-fund; the cost of the next cultivation; and lastly, the cost of keeping alive the actual producer of the harvest and his prolific family. These low-caste tillers live in a state of chronic ruin, with their dogs, pigs and cattle in thatched hovels situated on isolated mounds amidst the

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[1] A sect of the higher grade Sudras are so known in the Tamil country. Ed.

[2] Known as Maravars, Kullars, &c. Ed.

fields, far away from the shrines of the mundane deities.[1]

It was a bright, hot afternoon in April and nearly a dozen Brahmins were gathered together in the front verandah of a low, flat-roofed house in the middle of the Brahmin street. One of them, the village astrologer, was absorbed in the study of a ponderous palmyra-leaf book and a diagram drawn with some green leaves on the plastered floor over which some cowries were mysteriously arranged. The front door of the house was closed and all the other men, except two, were chewing *thamboolam*[2] after their noon-meal and had caste-marks[3] on their foreheads. But the faces of the other two—a venerable, old man of three-score years and an exact edition of him of less than half that age—shewed no signs other than of suppressed anxiety and dejection. Though it was close on 4 P.M. they had not broken fast for the day yet and the filled ones were advising them to take heart and be of good cheer. The astrologer suddenly lifted his head

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[1] Brahmins—also called 'Boosurar' or earthly gods. Ed.

[2] Betel-leaves, areca-nuts and lime. Ed.

[3] They are many and are put on generally after a bath. The noon-meal closely follows the bath and so the caste-mark generally indicates a filled belly. Ed.

and with a stretch and a yawn declared that nothing could be expected till 7-45 A.M. next morning and that it would most probably be a girl. On this the two fasting men were pressed further to go for their meal; but, just then, a young female voice, some of its natural music clearly audible even in such acute physical agony, shrieked out from within: "O! I cannot bear it! Take my life away quietly, O my god! Take my life away!" The strong young man could no longer contain his grief and burst into lamentations and sobs, even like a child. The aged parent, 'with eyes bedimmed with tears,' could only touch his son on the shoulder and mutter in broken tones, "Bear up, my son, bear up; it is the will of God." The piercing shriek of the woman, labouring to add another sufferer to this vale of toil and tribulation, was so surcharged with helpless agony and despair, that even the prattling consolers were moved to tears and did not dare to intrude on the sacred sorrow of her husband. A sudden calm, a short suspense, a shriller and a painfuller shriek, and then the grating voice of grand-dame Nauny broke on their ears with the following words: "A male child, as plump and fair as a jack-fruit, born still and on a Tuesday too! Where be now the gods and goddesses of this

house, the guardian deities[1] who clamour for their debts on all auspicious occasions? Why, sure enough, they are as deaf and dumb as a stone-pillar when most wanted. Even the peculiar domestic goddesses[1] have made themselves rare now! If I am asked, I shall vote only for a public cremation of all of them *en masse*, even at the sacrifice of a good haystack." Ere Nauny had delivered her challenge, her sister Seshy had burst out of the house shouting, "What do you say?" and established herself in the middle of the men sitting outside. The rest of the inhabitants of the street, men, women and children, were immediately there, in expectation of fun.

Seshy was an old, ugly widow with a clean-shaven head; and her waving to and fro in hysteric frenzy, frightfully deranged her scanty garment and rendered her less an object of reverence than ever. But her company knew better and believing that she was possessed by some powerful departed spirit who had taken offence at her sister Nauny's homely rebuke, they pressed round her on all sides to see and hear

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[1] Like the ancient Romans, the Hindus too worship the manes, especially of their female ancestors. Demon-worship is also common. As the practices differ among the numerous castes and sects, the subject is a vast one and cannot be discussed here. Ed.

what might follow. Nauny too had come out of the chamber, all unpresentable though she was; but, the most eager and anxious among the crowd was the venerable old patriarch of the house who stood suppliantly before the 'medium' and implored forgiveness for any faults he may have unwittingly committed. "Forgive, O god or goddess, whoever you may be," pleaded the old man, "forgive the faults a poor mortal may have committed in ignorance. Order me as you will and I shall obey. Only grant the life of this poor infant and make me your life-long slave. Be pleased to tell me who you are."

"Do you not know me, you ungrateful man," vociferated the woman with sardonic laughter, "and dare you forget me? I shall teach you better than that, O I shall teach you; I shall break and eat it up like sugar-cane; I shall; I shall." The 'medium' made gestures suitable to the concluding words referring to a sweet luncheon and laughed again. The old man again implored her to forgive him and then she declared herself, sobbing and lamenting loudly this time, in these words: "I am grand-dame Pauppa, I am grand-dame Pauppa. Who does not know Pauppa, drowned in the garden well? I am shivering with cold, I am shivering with cold." She was now trembling and shivering as with an attack

of severe ague. The old man promised on oath to purchase a new red cloth and dedicate it to the shade of shivering Pauppa as soon as his daughter-in-law recovered and again pleaded for the child's life. "Place him on the bare ground newly washed with cowdung and call him by the name of 'Govinda' thrice," thundered forth the appeased Pauppa. In the twinkling of an eye grand-dame Nauny vanished into the chamber and was presently heard shouting "Govinda" at the topmost pitch of her voice, perhaps thinking that shivering shades may be dull of hearing. She deliberately called out 'Govinda' four times, once *extra* to make up for any error in counting; and the infant not shewing any signs of life, she hit it on the chest with her closed fist in sheer disappointment and disgust and turned her ample back on it, saying something not exactly complimentary to shivering Pauppa. But, lo! the decree of fate and the sharpness of Nauny's thumb-nail proved too much for the silent efforts of the young one to escape an earthly existence: the blood flowed freely from the cut flesh, the baby-limbs kicked upwards and I began my worldly career with a feeble cry of pain and grief, a cry that revived my fainting and neglected mother and perhaps saved her life. So strange is this world, so fickle and inconsistent its joys and woes!

Chapter the Second.

WHEREIN THE READER IS INTRODUCED TO THE SEVERAL MEMBERS OF MY FAMILY.

THILLAI Sambasiva Dheekshithar was a great land-lord and a greater Sanskrit scholar. An acknowledged master of the higher systems of Indian philosophy,[1] he was still a strict follower of popular Hinduism; nay, more, he was a fanatical Sivaite and a good hater of Vishnu and his devotees. Though he was a very intelligent man and a skilful combatant in the subtle hair-splittings of Indian logic, he felt too strongly and personally on this point to ever argue about it and he made an annual exodus to the neighbouring village of Nandiyur, for ten days, during the festival in the Vishnu temple at Thillai. Another little prejudice, which with the one just mentioned formed the most salient features of his character, was an undisguised contempt towards all human beings who were not of the Brahmin caste. He would sooner have worshipped the Virgin Mary than Vishnu and he would have preferred a Brahmin murderer to a Sudra saint. The only Sudra whom he ever spoke to without much self-reproach was the fanatic Sadhasiva Pillai who hated Vishnu even more than my grand-father. So whimsi-

[1] The chief are six in number. Ed.

cal was this man that he took immense pleasure in saying often, "*Siva*—Rama—Krishna—Govinda—Narayana—*Mahadeva!*[1] squeeze him well, O squeeze him," quite forgetting that he was thereby mentioning the name of Vishnu twice as many times as that of Siva. In other respects my grand-father was an orthodox Brahmin with a number of inconsistent and ill-digested opinions; and I have since heard that the apothecary and the midwife were not called in even when my mother was so dangerously ill, solely because he objected to them on the score of the former being a male and the latter a low-caste Christian woman of doubtful character.

A peculiar circumstance in the history of the family was that the heir generally had more wives than children. My great-grand-father had married four wives one after another and survived them all and the nett result of it was my grand-father, grand-dame Seshý the chosen vessel of the shivering shade of Pauppa and grand-dame Nauny who clawed me into life. My grand-father married three wives, of whom the first died young; the second was my grand-mother who died before my birth and the last was still living.

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[1] The first and the last are names of Siva and the four between, names of Vishnu, who was thus being squeezed at either end by Siva. Ed.

My grand-father's last wife was evidently a tribulation devised for him by the offended Vishnu. In her first married days she is said to have been a stylish, loose-tongued, ill-bred, bold girl who was as jolly as my grand-father was holy and who promised to bring his grey hairs to an ignoble grave. She was two years under fifteen and he under fifty when he wedded her; and when she came to live with him after a few months, he learnt for the first time that wealth and Sanskrit lore sometimes failed to bring reverence and respect to the possessor; but, what most annoyed him was his girl-wife's habit of always singing of some amorous escapade or feat of Sri Krishna.[1] His protests and pleadings seemed only to increase the singing and his own house was like a hell to his Sivaite soul. He could not threaten or maltreat her for fear of worse misconduct and as for divorce,—well, his Hindu mind never thought of it. So he quietly bent his head to the unavoidable and resumed his Vedantic studies. But, really, the girl's freaks were due more to ill-breeding than to any innate wickedness; and time and sorrow—she gave birth to four children all of whom died within six months after birth—chastened her heart and subdued her

[1] The Avatar of Vishnu, who was the moving spirit in the Mahabharata. Ed.

spirit, so that, at the time of my advent into the family she was well under curb. I feel a sentimental reluctance to describe my beloved parents in this chapter and shall therefore speak of them later on as occasion may arise. Grand-dames Seshy and Nauny were childless widows who had lost their husbands in youth and were ever since living with their brother. Only a boy remains to be mentioned, my step-uncle, my grand-father's fifth child by his third wife, who was seven years old when I was born.

The family property was a free gift made by a local potentate, nearly three hundred years before, to one of my ancestors. The giver was a non-Brahmin profligate, poor in everything but the graces of mammon and the receiver a pious Brahmin deeply versed in the Vedas[1] and the Shastras.[1] To my mind, the motive for the gift is not apparent; but at this distant day and with a fortune to lose thereby, I am not anxious to question its validity.

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[1] The Hindu's 'Bible.' Ed.

Chapter the Third.

WHICH RECORDS SOME EARLY REMEMBRANCES AND HAPPENINGS.

ON turning over the earliest legible tablets of my memory, I find recorded certain curious facts and incidents relating to my grand-dames which may not perhaps be quite uninteresting. They were only step-sisters of my grand-father, but, they had chosen to live with him on the demise of their husbands; nay, they always averred they were cunningly drawn into it by him, because they had each about a thousand rupees of their husbands' money, given to them as "subsistence allowance." Their step-brother had sympathised with them in their sorrow; had offered to give them a home for their lives; had fought for and secured their "allowances" from the brothers of their husbands; had, in fact, behaved in the most brotherly manner, until he had well incorporated their money with his own property. Then followed neglects, misunderstandings and quarrels, loud accusations punctuated by sobs, abuses and beating of the breast on the one side and louder accusations of base ingratitude and even applications of the outstretched hands to the back of the neck, on the other.

I clearly remember one such occurrence: On

a Monday evening, the old sisters wished to worship in the Siva temple and wanted two cocoanuts to be offered to the god and an ounce or two of ghee to be poured into the lamp at the shrine. The family owned two extensive cocoanut gardens and there were three milch cows, besides half a dozen buffaloes. Certainly, there was no lack of cocoanut or ghee in the house and a brisk trade was being privately carried on in them by my step-grand-mother Vedambal. When Vedambal was first asked by Seshy for the cocoanuts and the ghee, she was softly singing a favourite song and mixing broken cotton-seed and bran for the cows :—

> "'Why didst thou pull me by my hair, O Krishna,' asked the maid ;
> 'Your eyes, it was, my sweet, that first enticed my heart,' he said ;
> And then declaring that her words had rent his heart in twain,
> He kissed her on her coral lips and laughed, the roguish swain !"

In this amorous colloquy, Vedambal did not or would not hear Seshy's words.

"May we take a couple of cocoanuts and some ghee to the temple ?" repeated Seshy.

"Shall I fetch two cocoanuts from the heaps in the upper storey, grandma ?" I put in. The bamboo ladder to the store-room was steep

and ricketty and so I took great pleasure in going up and down it as often as I could find an excuse for doing so. "And get your leg broken and become a cripple like the God Natesa," added Vedambal, by way of an answer to my words.

"No, you need not go; I shall fetch them myself," said Nauny, who had hitherto been standing by silently.

"They are all counted and already bespoken to the bazaarman at three rupees a hundred. There are only a few spare ones and they will be required for culinary purposes in the house," said Vedambal.

"Does the god eat off the cocoanuts? Or do we use them in the kitchen without breaking them? We shall simply make the offering and bring them back. Do we take cocoanuts daily to the temple? We want it, only because to-day is Somavara-Pradhosham,"[1] replied Seshy warmly. "Then, ask your brother," said Vedambal. "Am I the master of the house? I do not know anything about it." My grand-dames knew by long experience that after such an answer there was no use in asking the mistress of the house and so they went towards the

[1] An occasion very auspicious to the worship of Siva. Ed.

front portion of the house in search of my grand-father. At that moment my grand-father entered the house and said to me, "Child, go and drive away the cows that are eating the paddy drying in the yard." Two things in this speech require elucidation: as my name was one of the names of the god Vishnu, he always called me 'child' and never by my name; as it was a sin to molest the sacred cow in any manner, especially in one of his sanctity, age and learning, he generally sent some one else to drive off the holy offenders when they invaded his valuables.

"Brother," said Seshy, "you know that to-day is Somavara-Pradhosham. Myself and Nauny wish to take two cocoanuts and some ghee to the temple and Vedambal told us to ask you."

"No, no; why do you misrepresent? I first said that the cocoanuts had already been sold but you insisted on having them and so I told you to ask your brother," cried out Vedambal from the kitchen and this settled my grand-father's reply. He curtly gave a denial and went away amidst the loud moans and lamentations of his sisters. My father came in after a while and on learning the reason for the quarrel, fetched two cocoanuts and gave them to his aunts and also directed my mother to give them some ghee in a vessel. Vedambal never spoke to my father or

even remained seated in his presence, though he was her step-son, because she was only about the same age as his wife, my mother. So her grumblings at this procedure did not reach farther than the kitchen.

On another occasion, I remember, it was even worse. The bone of contention was the cost of a small pilgrimage which the old women wished to make to a neighbouring shrine. Words grew hot and hotter till my grand-father, enraged beyond measure, caught hold of a sister in each hand by the neck and pushed them out, ordering them to quit his house for ever. They demanded their money, the interest on which alone, they said, would have been enough to maintain at least half-a-dozen widows like them in ease and comfort. He replied that they had already eaten off their little pittance and more, and eventually they went to a neighbour's house and stayed there for three days, until my father returned from his uncle's village whither he had gone on some business and fetched them home. In those days I used to wonder whether my grand-father was more afraid of his wife or of my father; I should say perhaps, more indulgent to his wife or to my father.

It was about this time that an incident happened which proved unhappy to the old man

and the family. One day he was returning from the river after his bath in the morning, when he saw a Shanan coming along the road in front of him. Owing to his age, learning, orthodox life and patriarchal position, any low-caste man in the village who happened to meet him always retired to a respectful distance with a very low bow. But this Shanan was a Christian and had his own opinions about caste tyranny. So he took no more notice of my grand-father than he would have taken of any other stranger, but walked straight along the Queen's road which had miry fields and thorny ridges on either side. My grand-father would not pollute his breath by speaking to him and the Shanan was deaf and blind to his clapping of hands and other impatient gestures. Nay, more; when, driven by necessity, the old man left the road and ran along a field-ridge to escape pollution, the Shanan took a pleasure in walking along the side of the road nearest to him and thus made him run faster and farther. This conduct so exasperated my grandsire that he at once summoned a Marava who was working in an adjacent garden and ordered him to teach the Shanan to behave better. When we heard of it we all felt the insult most keenly and half the village was up in arms,—foul abuse and any sticks that came to hand. I

felt the blot on the family scutcheon so deeply that I pelted the Shanan twice with stones when he was brought for trial before the villagers.

The Shanan resorted to British justice and the European missionary supported him strongly and it was then rumoured that a demi-official order was sent by the District Magistrate to the Brahmin Sub-Magistrate who enquired into the case, to punish the offenders if he cared for his official berth. My grand-father was fined one hundred rupees and two other Brahmins were fined fifty rupees each; in addition to this, three Maravars became Her Majesty's guests during an apprentice-course in the art of knitting coir ropes. But this was not all: a venomous thorn pricked my grand-father's left foot while he ran along the ridge to escape pollution and in the course of a month an abscess formed over the wound and growing from bad to worse, his life was despaired of and the whole family was immersed in grief. Promised no hope of recovery by the village physician and himself feeling none, my grand-father expressed a strong desire to go through the ceremony of Apath Sannyasam[1], or in other words, giving up the world when it has entirely given you up and you are forced to quit it.

[1] Becoming an ascetic at the last hour. Ed.

My father objected to this at first, but finally he was persuaded by others to acquiesce in it. So my grand-father was made an ascetic in bed. I do not remember all the details of the ceremony; but, I do remember having innocently asked my mother whether my grand-father had become a Mahomedan and we could not touch him any longer, when I saw they shaved his head clean and removed the holy thread.[1] My mother smiled through her tears and assured me that he had become more sacred than before and altogether beyond the joys and woes of mundane existence. He did not, after all, die then; and we had almost to regret his recovery.

When I now reflect on his then predicament, with greater experience of this world, I feel more shame and grief on his account than I have ever felt for any sin of my own later days. Carlyle has said somewhere, perhaps in that huge hautch-pautch of facts and fancies—*Sartor Resartus*—that religion is the bond of society. I think that a little more thinking would have shewn the sage that hypocrisy rather is the real cement of our society. Think of it, think of it, reader, and the proposition will assume for you an axiomatic

[1] Worn as a caste-distinction over the left shoulder by all Brahmins and also by some other castes. Ed.

appearance. Look within yourself first, and observe how the tiger and the lamb are kept together in peace by hypocritical tact and the golden law of one thing at a time. Consistent throughout, men will be either brutes or saints and the wildest fancy cannot imagine a society of saints. Even as I am penning these lines, is not my 'common sense' mocking me from somewhere within and am I not so much of an hypocrite for posing to be so 'candid'? Whoever *can* and whoever *did* quite lay bare the inmost intricacies of the human intellectual machine? Next, take the family; and, reader, lay thy hand upon thy heart and tell me honestly whether you, your wife and your children can look back on any twenty-four hours of your long life under the same roof when you did not practise hypocrisy; nay, if you dare, try to be quite honest and speak out your minds for the next twenty-four hours from this moment and see whether the attempt does not lead you to the divorce and other diverse courts, if it did not end earlier in broken bones and skulls. And coming to society at large, the caste, the tribe, the state, the nation, the conglomeration of nations and all international law and equity, believe me, hypocrisy is the cement of the whole social fabric. Mutual deceit and self-deception alone keep society from utter

dissolution and there was never a truer story told than of the life-long friends who foolishly decided to speak plainly about each other's faults and never again met or spoke to each other on this side of the earth. But, mind you, the world does not call all hypocrisy by the same name and it has cunningly coined several convenient pseudonyms, such as, "common sense," "policy," "politeness," "courtesy," "good manners," "consideration for others' feelings" and the great motto "live and let live."

But even in this hypocritical world, what an unenviable position had the old man come to occupy! He was now an ascetic—a man who felt no desire or aversion for *any* thing in this wide world. His young son by his third wife and the Christian Shanan who had brought on him all this trouble, were now alike to him; the soul-spark in them both was from the same universal light; and that alone could come under his cognisance. Wife and child and grand-child, sister and brother, friend and foe, kinsman and stranger, all, all were only so many floundering rafts in the whirlpool of ignorance, who merited his uniform and loving pity and what help that was possible. He had for ever subdued his body, his speech and his mind. But in fact, was he now a whit better than when he necked his own sisters out

of his house or had a fellow-being bound and beaten for daring to walk along the Queen's road? No miracle had occurred and he was still the self-same weather-cock of joy and pain, of love and hatred, of deceit and self-deception. Even leaving purely worldly affairs out of account, had he not still the same partiality for Siva and the same unreasonable hatred and contempt for Vishnu? But with all this, his "common sense" told him that "appearances should be kept up." Reader! Is not this one phrase sufficient to prove to you that hypocrisy is the cement of society? So a comfortable room was set apart for him in the house and in this he studied and expounded philosophy when there were any visitors; and when there were no strangers, he conversed with his wife and children and quarrelled and talked regretfully of old times with his sisters or discussed family affairs with my father.

Chapter the Fourth.

WHEREIN THE PURSUIT OF KNOWLEDGE UNDER DIFFICULTIES IS DESCRIBED AND A SCHOOL-ROOM TECHNICALITY EXPLAINED.

IN these days when a school is becoming more and more inconceivable without benches and black boards, parallel and horizontal bars, books and slates, plastered floors and white-washed walls, a reduced photograph of a school of the old type will not be altogether uninteresting and as I was initiated into the mysteries of the alphabet in such a school, it will certainly not be out of place.

On the eastern bank of the canal running through the village from the tank towards the fields, stood the school in my village. It was a single room about twenty feet by fifteen, formed by three mud walls of an average man's height, with the fourth side quite open. The frame-work of the gabled roof above consisted of rough palmyra rafters and jungle-wood reepers. The thatch was of palmyra leaves and shewed several natural skylights made by the busy hand of Time. As it was a common building, so it was commonly neglected, until a total collapse and a destruction of the future citizens of Thillai were imminent and then the Village Parliament sanctioned its repair from the common exchequer.

Though, as already described, the school-room was physically open to all who may choose to enter it, including stray cattle and asses who generally meditated there at night, it was closed as with doors of adamant to all the "lower classes," only the twice-born and the 'high class' Sudras being admitted into it. I shall describe the last day of my study there, which also proved to be the most eventful of the period.

A strong smell of cowdung emerging from the floor first struck the olfactory nerves on entering the school and then the artistic display of innumerable cobwebs and spidernets in amazing patterns on the walls and inside the roof, attracted the attention. The flooring was swept daily and washed with cowdung and water twice a week by some of the older scholars; but they never chose to look at the walls which picturesquely presented several cowdung impressions of boyish hands and fingers, made when the youths got up after their cleaning work, pressing the hands against the walls for support. About twenty wooden satchels with palmyra-leaf books were suspended from wooden pegs which were driven into the walls in a zigzag line. The dark-green colour of the floor was set off by a piece of fine white sand, and several irregular patches of white sunlight pouring in through the openings in the roof.

About eight feet from the ground and binding the two slopes of the roof, there was a rough cross-beam of palmyra wood to the middle of which a short stout rope hung suspended.

Our Ichabod who gloried in the name of Sundaram Iyer was an old man of huge dimensions, with a short breath and a shorter temper. For over quarter of a century he had taught the young idea in the village how to shoot and he counted among his pupils two men who rose to high positions in the State. He always spoke of them as "those two smart fellows" and delighted to give us anecdotes about them which enhanced his own acumen and importance in our eyes. Asthma and an incessant cough had taken possession of him for some years past and we had therefore many a holiday during the rainy season. On this eventful day he was sitting on his two-feet-square mat of palmyra leaf, leaning on the wall near the open side, with the dreaded cane-ferula lying idly to his right. He was yawning and coughing by turns and the day was unusually dull, just the proverbial calm before a storm. Four urchins, almost nude, were learning the Tamil and the Grantha[1] alphabets by running their right forefingers over some characters sunk

[1] The characters used in South India for writing Sanskrit. They are closely allied to the Tamil characters. Ed.

in the ground for some unknown offence. These fingers looked leprotic, being partly worn out by this curious process of study. It was indeed copy-writing without any waste of valuable material such as pen, paper, ink or even palmyra leaves. Some others were learning by rote the multiplication formulæ: the leader for the time being, called out, "eight times nine, seventy-two; eight times nine, seventy-two; eight times nine, seventy-two;" then the rest of the party proclaimed, "nine times nine, eighty-one; nine times nine, eighty-one; nine times nine, eighty-one." Not without proper reason is 'three' regarded as a mystic number. A few more were writing copies with a steel-pointed iron style on palmyra leaves. Some of the advanced scholars including myself were learning by heart Tamil or Sanskrit verses from *cadjan* books. I have stated what we were all supposed to be doing; but what we actually did when our master was drowsy and yawning is quite another story. A more vigorous fit of cough than usual suddenly awoke him, and rubbing his eyes, he got up, took the cane-ferula in his hand and administered a stimulating blow to each of the smaller boys without any partiality or exception. The product of eleven times nine was howled out by a louder chorus, the styles ran faster and made a screech-

ing noise over the primitive copy books and some right forefingers became more leprotic than ever before. Then he resumed his seat and relapsed into his former drowsiness. Presently he sat up again, with the ferula in his hand, the action of taking up the cane with the dawn of wakefulness having by long habit become involuntary now, and called out "Govinda." I first thought he was repeating the name of the god Vishnu, but he looked at me and called again and so I left my place and went and stood before him. While examining or teaching a boy singly, it was his custom to describe a ring on the ground before him, within full reach of his ferula, and the pupil could on no account quit that circle before formal dismissal. I stood within that 'magic circle' as we boys called it and beating me once, though gently, for not obeying as soon as summoned, he ordered me to recite the Tamil stanza from *The Garland of Wisdom* prescribed as my lesson the previous day. I had learnt it well and so forthwith began :—

> Trust you may the fatal poison,
> Trust the floods and raging storm,
> Trust you may the maddened elephant,
> Deem the tiger void of harm,
> Trust the Messengers of Yama,[1]
> Robbers, hunters, murderers trust,

[1] The god of death in Hindu mythology. Ed.

But you trust the long-robed women,
Helpless roam the streets you must.

I should not omit to mention a little comment on this 'flower of wisdom' made for our edification by our monitor: he said that the verse warned the men not to place any trust in the respectable women of family who wore a single long garment and that the caution did not at all apply to the women of bad character who, as a class, wore petticoats and bodice and a loose cloth over the upper part of the body. The pupil called after my turn was a sluggard and so his recitation was profusely punctuated by blows of varying strength from the teacher's ferula. The Sanskrit sloka repeated by him from the *Essence of Justice*, is however interesting and I shall therefore translate it below: "A gift will benefit the giver, in his next birth, according to its innate value, when given to a non-Brahmin; when given to a man who is a Brahmin by birth alone, its benefit will be a thousand times its value; but, when given to a Brahmin who studies the Vedas and the Shastras, its benefit will be ten thousand times its value; but, when given to a Brahmin who studies the Vedas and the Shastras as they ought to be studied and acts according to them, the benefit will be immeasurably far above the value of the gift."

I now felt inclined for a stroll and so went and stood before the teacher with the left arm reverentially crossed on my breast, feet close, body slightly bent forward and the right arm bent at the elbow and pointing upwards with all except the forefinger closed, thus indicating my desire to go out of the school for a special purpose. The exercise of administering the rod on my successor had resulted in a fit of cough and as its end was not visible in the near distance, I took, as usual with us, one vertical shake of the teacher's head for a nod of assent and bolted out of the school, ready for any mischief. In judging of what follows, I request the reader to remember his own schoolday pranks and not forget the mischievousness characteristic of all boyhood. I was meandering leisurely, cutting eights on the broad, dull canal with pieces of broken tiles, when I found myself close to the mango tope near the temple of Siva. We all knew that the tope had been leased by Thavasi Thevan, the friend and helper of our teacher, and we had been specially warned not to approach it, if we cared to have a whole skin to our bodies. But there was none to be seen in the tope and those who are clever in aiming stones will readily grant that it is at least as easy and more profitable to bring down a bunch of delicious mangoes from a short

tree groaning under their weight than to cut eights on running water. Up went the piece of tile whizzing in the air and down came three mangoes and fell outside the enclosure too. To gather the booty and run off to the adjacent tank was the work of an instant; but, certainly, Thavasi Thevan who suddenly sprang forward from behind a tree, was a faster runner and so the mangoes were thrown into the senseless tank and I came panting into the school-room, with the enraged gardener at my heels. "What, Sami!"[1] exclaimed he to the astounded teacher, "is it for this that I sent ten mangoes and six cocoanuts to your house the other day? Well, I was a fool to do so, for if Thavasi cannot guard his own property, who else can, I wonder. Surely, I shall not be a fool again and whosoever dares to come near my tope again, let him first take leave of his family, for his grave shall be at the foot of the tree he steals from. This little mite of a Govinda Iyen to rob me of my fruits! I would have crushed you like a mosquito, but for your old grand-father and your father." After thus letting me know to whom I owed my life, the gardener vanished. But, lo! what a frenzy of rage, fear

[1] Means literally 'god.' It is used by Sudras while addressing Brahmins. Ed.

and peevishness had he raised in the old, decrepit septagenerian! He could not speak out for mere passion and rising from his seat with an alacrity we scarcely suspected him capable of, he mercilessly beat me and finally declared that he would make an example of me and inflict on me the punishment of *Kothandam.* I have here omitted the obscene oaths and abuses he showered on my devoted head.

Kothandam means 'a bow' in Sanskrit and in Tamil it may mean 'punishment by the king'; but, I think, it has come into use in the school-room as meaning 'the king of punishments' or 'the supreme punishment.' I had often heard of it but had never seen it inflicted. As soon as the teacher gave the order, the monitor commenced the necessary preparations with a sense of his own importance and a cruel assiduity. I have already referred to a stout short rope hanging from the cross-beam in the middle of the room: sand was heaped just below this rope and all the available iron styles planted on it with the sharp points upwards. The monitor first suggested that variety of *Kothandam* in which, instead of the styles, some red chillies were slowly burnt below the sufferer; but the teacher vetoed it promptly on account of his own coughing propensity. My waist-cloth was tucked up to

the waist so that the blows may fall on the bare skin and three of my fellow-scholars lifted me up bodily and made me take hold of and cling to the rope with both my hands. I was advised to keep firm, for, if I dropped down, I was told that my feet would be pierced by the styles below. Then that merciless brute of my teacher flogged me furiously with his cane. Whack, whack, fell the blows burning into my flesh ; my tender hands were sore and bleeding owing to the roughness of the rope and I was roaring in agony like a mad bull. After the ninth blow I dropped down and fainted away, with my left foot pierced by one of the steel-pointed styles.

Chapter the Fifth.

WHEREIN IS DESCRIBED A SITTING OF THE VILLAGE PARLIAMENT.

THE village school-master got his remuneration from the fathers of his pupils in the shape of grain during the harvests. There were also certain perquisites sanctioned by long custom such as a little oil and a few red chillies from each of the pupils on Saturdays, a new cloth, a small sum of money and some rice and vegetables when a boy was newly put to school, a free invitation to all ceremonial feasts that occurred in the houses of his pupils and such other privileges. So he had to be on friendly terms with everybody; but, Thillai was unfortunate in having a peevish and irritable pedagogue. It seems I was taken home on a cot and I never more re-entered that school. The village parliament resolved to punish the school-master for his brutal treatment of me and for this purpose it assembled one evening in front of my house, so that my ascetic grand-father might favour it with his counsel if necessary. I was then convalescing and saw everything from within the front room of the house, with great curiosity and no small sense of personal triumph.

The parliament consisted of about twenty-five members of whom eighteen were Brahmins and the

rest Sudras. It was very slow in coming together and many a member had to be specially sent for; so that, though its sitting was announced for 3 P.M., it was nearing five when about twenty members had gathered. In this connection, the story of the poet Kamban, who, finding it impossible after numerous efforts to bring together all the members of a sort of literary academy at Srirangam to submit to them his *Ramayanam* for opinion, presented himself before them with his poem when they had all gathered together to attend the funeral of one of their children, comes to my mind. The Brahmin members sat on the raised loggia and the other members on the verandah below. They were all chewing *thamboolam* at our expense and tobacco snuff was also handed round freely. My grand-father opened the proceedings by saying that they had met to punish the conduct of the school-master who had treated me cruelly, that the punishment of a fine of one rupee once before inflicted on him seemed to have had no effect and that though he had decided not to send me to his school any longer, (I was transported with joy on hearing it so publicly announced and affirmed) it was necessary, in the interests of the other pupils, to guard against such occurrences in future and he recommended the dismissal of Sundaram Iyer. This speech was preceded by

a preamble dwelling on the speaker's absolute indifference to mundane affairs and his entire disinterestedness in what he was going to utter for the benefit of his former fellow-citizens. On hearing this, the school-master, who was also present, expressed his great remorse for what had happened, promised most solemnly to behave better in future, dwelt on his long service of nearly thirty years and the fact that several of his present judges were once his pupils, discoursed on the heinousness of the sin of robbery (so he called my act) and the necessity of nipping it in the bud and appealed to the parliament for mercy and pardon, stating in conclusion that if it dismissed him in his old age, he and his family would have to starve and die at the doors of the members. A Sudra member insisted on the teacher's dismissal and informed the assembly that a more learned and capable teacher was available for service in the next village. Another member spoke of the foolishness of sparing the rod with children and heroically boasted that he had suffered the punishment of *Kothandam* thrice, during his school-days. "And all to no purpose," muttered another and those around him laughed gaily. In the end, the school-master was fined five rupees and advised to treat his boys better in future. The parliament having assembled and

being ready for business, a case of house-breaking and theft was brought to its notice. This had occurred a month ago in a Brahmin's house and had been immediately reported to the neighbouring police station. The police had enquired into the matter and finding the complainant unwilling to help them as they proposed and seeing no chance of detection, had "referred" the case as false and due to some quarrel between the two wives of the complainant and his brother who was living in the same house with him. This case was now taken up, and as the members were aware of the truth of the theft, the parliament called on the four Marava headmen of the village to make good the lost property, which was valued at nearly four hundred rupees. The headmen pleaded that the matter had in the first instance been reported to the police instead of to them alone, that they had thereby suffered some trouble and loss of money, that the crime was committed by the members of a gang from a distant village and that in those circumstances they could not be held liable for the property. Their objections were partly recognised and the complainant was fined twenty rupees for seeking police help without the permission of the village parliament, the fine to be credited to the village fund. Then the value of the jewels lost was discussed at

length and was finally reduced to three hundred rupees. The headmen were ordered to make good this amount within a week and they agreed to do so. It was nearly dark by this time and the assembly then broke up gradually.

Chapter the Sixth.

WHEREIN SOME MARRIAGES, BIRTHS, DEATHS, AND OTHER HAPPENINGS ARE RECORDED.

AS my grand-father disapproved strongly of my father's proposal to send me to the Christian Mission English school in a neighbouring village, I began to study Sanskrit under him. My *Upanayanam*[1] was performed this year and after a few months the marriage of my step-uncle Mahadeva Dheekshithar also took place. He was then about fourteen years of age and already a good student in Sanskrit; and his bride, his maternal uncle's daughter, was then four years old. Soon after this marriage, granddame Seshy shuffled off her mortal coil, and to our intense sorrow, her brother too did not long survive her, for we had to bury our grand-father next year. Within a month after his death, Vedambal insisted on a partition of the family. My father objected to this and said that the property had remained undivided for nearly two hundred years and more and that the partition

[1] The ceremony of investing with the holy thread, among the 'twice-born' castes. This occurs generally between the fifth and the ninth year of a Brahmin boy's life. He is then taught the '*Gayatri*' *Mantra*, rightly regarded as the most holy of all *Mantras*. It is, as it were, his spiritual rebirth and from that period he has to perform certain religious duties daily. Ed.

would damage it and reduce the local influence of the family. He said that as he was her step-son, he would behave towards her as he had been doing towards his father and be guided by her in everything; but she, and her son at her instigation, were deaf to all this and threatened to resort to law. So the ancient family property was divided and as the ancestral house belonged, by right of custom, to the youngest son, we had to leave the old familiar house and dwell in a strange, rented building, until another house could be built. This vexed us more than anything else, the more so as my sister had just been born. Vedambal being a widow and her son a minor, my father allowed her the choice in everything during the partition of the property, and I came to realise the full worth of this generosity only in my later days, when he spoke regretfully of many a favourite field and garden which he had been very fond of in his younger days and which had since been spoiled by bad management. Grand-dame Nauny fell to my father's share of course and I found what a kind and gentle heart she had, that her sourness of temper, sharpness of speech and amazonian boldness of action vanished altogether on her separation from Vedambal and that she soon became more than a tender mother to my parents.

With these sudden changes in the family, there was also a change in my studies; for, my father now sent me to the English school and I began to wonder at the glorious arbitrariness and irregularities of English pronunciation. Vedambal too sent her son to the same school and as soon as we had learnt the alphabet, the very first words we were taught, 'Know,' 'go,' 'to,' 'so,' 'put,' 'cut' and the like made us stare in amazement and despair. My uncle, who had already a very fair knowledge of Sanskrit, declared that English was the language of barbarians and that a stupendous memory was required to master it. However, being an older boy with an already trained mind, he progressed very fast and at the end of the third year, he left the school to join the high-school in his uncle's village. During the third year of my English study, there was an offer of marriage for me and as the bride's family was rich and influential, my father accepted the offer and the marriage was duly celebrated. My wife was a little girl of five years and I was immensely pleased at the pranks and fun we had during the marriage. It is true I did not understand the *mantras* that I was made to recite or the ceremonies that I was made to perform, but so it had been with my *Upanayanam* and so it was with the prayers I was scrupulously offering thrice daily; in fact,

I never bestowed a thought on them and never attempted to understand the nature and responsibilities of marriage. Myself and my wife were children and were pleased with all the feastings, rejoicings and processions held in our honour. I was also pleased to see that my wife was afraid of me and shyly ran away on seeing me. My playmates chafed me about this and caught hold of her and brought her close to me; but, each time she ran away on being let go, I seemed to rise in my own estimation and theirs. Indeed, it is very pleasant to be a bride-groom, to wear new cloths and innumerable jewels and be coaxed and petted by every one around. I felt also very proud and vain when I had to grow all my hair for the first six months after the marriage and generally combed it on either side like a girl and thought that it increased my beauty. The first year of the marriage was full of ceremonial occasions and frequent presents of new cloths and jewels. My studies were greatly disturbed by all this, but I then thought that that fact only increased the value of my pleasures. I was however unsuccessful in the annual examination and as promotion to the next higher class was stoutly denied to me for this reason, in spite of my father's assurance that lost ground would soon be recovered and as our rented house was found to

be very inconvenient and the new one had not yet been built, my father decided to remove the family temporarily to Bamboor, so that I might join the college there and study undisturbedly for some years, till I completed my under-graduate course. Before concluding this changeful chapter, I may as well record the result of my marriage and state that my wife, to our great grief, died of small-pox two years after the ceremony.

Chapter the Seventh.

WHEREIN I MATRICULATE AND ATTEND A DANCE.

I am not inclined to describe my scholastic course step by step. My father employed two private tutors for me and with their able coaching I passed the matriculation examination in my fifteenth year. My teachers and school-mates till then require but brief notice. I now remember well one teacher and he was a Sudra or I should have sworn he was closely related to Sundaram Iyer of *Kothandam* renown. This man generally addressed his scholars by the endearing titles of 'cow' or 'buffalo' and he had an original way of punishing them. He pulled out the drawer from his table, made the delinquent rest his hand on its rim and then pushed it in with a jerk, so that the boy's knuckles were squeezed between the top plank of the table and the drawer, with great precision and force. His students were frequently made to stand on the benches and whole pages of some book they could not understand were prescribed for copying at home, as a punitive task. This man was said to have aspired to a mastery of the English language by getting Webster's *Dictionary* by heart, but he progressed only as far as the letter D and then gave up the task in despair. The only other teacher I

remember was the Tamil *Munshee* with his inexhaustible fund of irrelevant anecdotes and stories. Of my numerous school-mates, I made only one friend, the gentleman destined to edit these memoirs after my demise. In fact, I never had a knack of making friends and was always spoken of as a haughty and unsocial being. Nor was the usual conversation of my school-mates very attractive to me; for, some of the older boys were constantly discussing nautch and singing parties and dancing women and frequently came yawning to the class, with heavy eyes; while some of the rest were ardent gamblers at the game of cards and talked unceasingly of trumps and clubs. I was ever an eager student, fond of burning the midnight oil, and for a few weeks before the examination, I used to read in my room sitting on my bed with a rope from the ceiling tied to my tuft of hair, so that if I sank down with sleep, I was promptly pulled up.

It was about this time that I first felt the power of woman. There was a marriage in a kinsman's house and I went to see the fun one night, after college hours. A dance was going on when I reached the place. The bride and the bridegroom were sitting on a cushioned couch at one end and the whole *pandal*, a large enclosure about eighty feet by forty, was quite full with

spectators. The lane between the men, left for the woman to dance in, was very narrow and the raised verandahs were full of lady spectators. I squeezed myself into a place on the carpet as near the dancer as possible and began to look about. The dancer was a very pretty and well-built girl of about sixteen summers, with an intelligent and expressive countenance, and a most charming voice. Her tutor who led the dance was a famous expert in his profession and he always gave out Tamil as well as Sanskrit versions of the Telugu songs, in the same tunes, so that every one of the spectators could understand the meaning of the gestures. When I went in, she was expressing with her gestures the sense of the following chorus of a famous song: "Where is my Gopalakrishna? O! where is my Gopalakrishna?" The wonder, the regret, the vexation, the disappointment, the anger, the sorrow, the agony, the impatience, the despair, which the dancer's face and gestures expressed by turns at not finding her imaginary lover, were so vivid and real, that there was not a single head in the audience, young or old, which did not shake wildly in admiration and innumerable were the interjectionary remarks that were made almost involuntarily. I actually heard two ladies saying that the men would inevitably become

the willing slaves of such a woman who captivated even the hearts of her own sex so irresistibly. For my own part, I sat gazing on her like a stone and I was not aware that my heart was going away from me every moment. Once she turned round and said something to her tutor and then her suddenly changed conversational voice sent a thrill through my frame and made me almost faint away in an ecstasy. I saw two men vying with each other in paying her: if one man gave her two rupees, the other gave three and then the first man gave three too and so on. I simply envied them and wished I had a gold mine at my elbow. One man proposed that she should smear the bodies of some of the gentlemen present with sandal-paste, as is sometimes done during such occasions. But she just made a bow and said that it was beneath the dignity of such a respectable audience, not to mention her own dignity. This smart repartee quite settled me and I became her slave immediately. My utmost ambition was to be near her always and I coined some pretexts and stayed away from college till the marriage was over. I wished to talk to her and reveal my mad love, but she was always surrounded by my seniors. At last she left the village and I felt a void in my heart which made me extremely miserable. I could not eat well and

my mother asked me several times whether I was ailing in any way. I wrote to the dancer two letters, swearing that she was an angel and imploring her not to contract such bad habits as drinking and cheating, which were characteristic of the women of her class. I got by heart a certain *mantram* and repeated it a hundred times daily, coupled with her name, intending to win her heart thereby. I had no money with me then and I believe, that alone saved me. Gradually, my passion wore away and I forgot her ; and when I saw her dance again after some years, neither she nor her art had any charms for me. But I know for a fact that the life of one young man who had more money than brains was completely wrecked by her and he died in madness before he was thirty, leaving a young widow and a child ; and I have heard that she similarly ruined several other families.

Chapter the Eighth.

WHICH DESCRIBES MY UNDER-GRADUATE STUDIES.

MY uncle Mahadevan had been staying with us for one year now. He passed his matriculation, after one year's failure, an year before me, from a native high-school; and then he came to Bamboor to join the college. Though his mother did not much like it, my father insisted on his staying with us and so we had him. He had his own rented room, however, to study in. We were naturally much thrown together but I always treated him with a regard due to a senior and a brother of one's father to boot; and he was fond of me and indulged me much, though I soon found that he put a curb on his tongue and behaviour in my presence. He had been brought up by his father in strict orthodox discipline during childhood and early youth and when the weight was suddenly removed, his spirit bounded up like a spring-cushion and all the native buoyancy and abandon of his character asserted themselves. He was a smart, intelligent fellow and a brilliant companion. He had his violent moods and impulses but his heart was sound on the whole and his hand was extremely liberal. My father found it inconvenient to stay out of his village any longer and so he left me in

my uncle's charge and returned with our family to Thillai. We had two rooms with a doorway between; my uncle and a classmate of his occupied one room and I shared the other with my friend whom I shall call "Pamba." We all messed in a Brahmin hotel and my uncle was the moving spirit in it. His inexhaustible Sanskrit *slokas* treating of love and jealousy, his witty and vehement conversation sweeping everything before it like a wild torrent, his tender heart and free hand, and, above all, his smiling and handsome countenance, diffusing sunshine and mirth whithersoever he went, were welcome everywhere. He soon became the idol of my heart, as of many another boy; and as he was my uncle, I thought he was my peculiar property and felt jealous when he showed too much fondness to any of my friends. We lived together only for one year, for he left for Madras next year to study for engineering; and during this year, he guided my studies and opinions and ineffaceably left his stamp on my character.

I was till then an ordinary Brahmin boy, performing my three daily ablutions faithfully, though without understanding them; generally believing in the gods of the Hindu pantheon and in peculiar domestic deities and ghosts, such as the shade of shivering Pauppa, though not on an

intelligent conviction; easily susceptible to the influence of the innumerable superstitions and traditions I had bowed to from childhood; and considering, for no patent reason, the institutions of caste, child-marriage, enforced widowhood, subjection of women, joint-family system and the like as ideal ones ordained by sages and incapable of improvement or modification. All these opinions changed very soon in my uncle's company and I became, under his guidance, an ardent reader and admirer of the works of the American atheists Ingersoll and Draper and the English atheists Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant. It was all like a new and beautiful country suddenly thrown open to my view and my spirit which, in the American's language, had "broken the fetters," delighted to roam over it at its own free will, undisturbed and untrammelled by any scruples. Tyndall, Huxley and Spencer also claimed my time and attention; but this was later on, and the brilliant Ingersoll was my god at this period. These were my Vedas and Shastras; and for pure literature, I read the novels of Reynolds with their exciting illustrations and became familiar with crime and vice. A sort of informal 'free-thought meeting' was held weekly in my uncle's room and I attended it regularly and listened to the thunderous curses showered on the unseen

head of the Almighty and witnessed the elaborate dissection and exposure of all our social institutions. As a result of all this, when I passed my F.A. examination and rejoined my uncle in Madras, I was a boy after his own heart: I had long discontinued my ablutions, I had the sincerest contempt for all ancient institutions and customs and I had partly lost the delicacy of feeling peculiar to adolescence and felt no more that a dancing woman's touch would pollute me. There was also a physical change due mainly to Reynolds: for, the first thing on my reaching Madras was to consult an oculist and purchase a pair of spectacles to relieve my short-sightedness.

Chapter the Ninth.

WHICH RECORDS A STRANGE DREAM AND ITS STRANGER REALISATION.

IT was during the first year of my collegiate course, when I had gone home to our new house in Thillai for the summer vacation, that I dreamt a strange dream one night. I was a bit imaginative from my early days and my uncle sometimes playfully called me 'a poetical dreamer.' But neither *A dream of fair women* nor *A dream of intellectual beauty* described by Tennyson and Shelley is at all like my dream. The only dream which in a way corresponds with it is the one mentioned in a recent Tamil drama *Manonmanyam*, the plot of which is said to have been taken from Lytton's *Secret Way*. As I have not read that novel, I cannot say how the dream is described by Lytton or whether it is mentioned by him at all. I shall therefore give out my own dream and ask the reader to compare it with his own similar experiences, if he has had any.

I was sleeping in the front room of our new house one night, when my mother's scream suddenly awoke me. She had been stung by a scorpion and was writhing in intolerable pain. My father was not at home and so I ran to a neighbour who was an able *Mantravadin*. He came with me and steadily looking at my mother's

foot where the scorpion had stung her, muttered some *Mantras*. In three or four minutes the pain gradually descended from the hip, up to which it had risen by that time, and in a couple of minutes more, the pain altogether vanished and the magician went away to his bed. I lay down again, and conversing for sometime with my mother, fell into a deep slumber. It was early in the morning when I had my dream. A phæton drawn by two milk-white horses came slowly along the road towards the village and stopped at the farther end of our street. Someone with a veiled face alighted from it and came to my house and entered the room in which I was sleeping, in spite of the treble-bolted door, as persons can enter only in a dream. The phantom approached me and softly taking me by the hand, sat by my side and lifted up the veil from the face, when, lo! I looked on heavenly beauty for an ineffable moment. It was so sudden and so transcendent that in that moment, "thought was not; in enjoyment it expired." It thrilled my being with unspeakable joy and for long years after, I felt something of that ecstasy whenever I recalled that vision before "the sessions of sweet silent thought," though now my memory fails and the picture is faint and blurred. O! it was something so soul-stirring and divine, that I would

gladly sleep away the rest of my mortal years to see such another vision. But the divine element was there only for a moment, though an æon of ordinary life was nothing to it; for, at the next instant, I seemed to look on the familiar face of my friend Pamba. But yet it was not Pamba's plain features[1] either, for there was still a magnificence, a charm, a splendour, an inexpressible sweetness, which, though not quite divine, were certainly superhuman. The voice too was quite unlike my friend's cackling[2] and had in it the ring of the music of the spheres. I do not remember any one of the many sweet, good things said to me; I was not able to remember them even the next morning; nor do I know how long the vision lasted. Suddenly it seemed to fly away, and in my eager attempt to grasp it, I struck my hands against the iron bars of the window and awoke with a pang in my heart. It was about 5 A.M. and I wept bitterly like a child. I felt as if my heart had been torn out of its place and taken away and I fancied I felt a physical

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[1] In justice to myself, I must protest against this statement of my late lamented friend and assert that though my features are neither 'divine' nor 'superhuman,' they are not quite as 'plain' as stated here. Ed.

[2] I regret I cannot contradict this statement, with equal confidence. Ed.

void within my breast. I could not believe that it was a mere dream and so I hastily left my bed and went to the end of the street and finding no phæton or white steeds or Pamba there, I walked along the road for about a mile in the hope of overtaking them. The smart rays of the morning sun soon brought me to reason and I slowly retraced my steps with a broken heart, which, I thought, would never be wholly patched up. Of course I could not eat well or take pleasure in my usual books and pastimes and my mother was anxious and perplexed for a whole week on my account. I wrote to my friend Pamba requesting to inform me of what he was doing on that particular night; he prosaically replied that he had been sleeping soundly from 8 P.M. to 6 A.M. and added that I might have had a nightmare[1]! But I was nevermore the same youth; there was a void, a bare blank in my life; and I often felt restless and dejected for no special reason. Indeed, the supreme ecstasy of that moment has so wrought into my life and penetrated my being, that I shall carry the impression, however dulled by time, to my funeral pyre.

During the next (winter) vacation, my second marriage took place. I had now sufficiently imbibed of my uncle's opinions and I first objected

[1] I was put out of temper by the "plain features." Ed.

to it on the ground that it might prove a hindrance to my studies. It was the first time I opposed my father's will and he was somewhat put out at it. The bride's party was very pressing and would not hear of any delay. I also told my mother that I first wished to see.

> "That not impossible She
> That shall command my heart and me."

The bride's party first objected to this, as it savoured of the engagement of a nautch-girl for a dance, but eventually consented and so I went to my fiancee's village. The horoscopes were duly consulted before this and found to agree on the square.

When I reached the house of my intended, it was about 9 P.M. The rest of the village was already rapt in dark slumber and a small solitary lamp was dimly burning in the middle chamber, in expectation of my arrival. I sat down near the lamp and when the wick was pushed forward and sent forth some sparks and a brighter light, I noticed that two female forms were asleep on some old cloth in a corner of the room. The crackling sparks—called the flowering of the light—were noted and remarked on as a good omen. An old lady came from the kitchen and woke up the two sleepers; and one of them, a slim pretty-looking girl of about ten years, was,

after much shaking, whispering, and rubbing of eyes, made to do obeisance at my feet and introduced as my fiancee. She got up and vanished into the house, not without blushes, I fancied. But my attention had already been enchained by the other sleeper, who had also got up indeed, but was still half-sleepy and was sitting up, facing the lamp, with her beautiful black hair flowing like a robe all round her in charming undulations. She was about eighteen years of age and even her vacant gaze powerfully brought back to my mind my divine vision. Hers was a beauty which you cannot attribute in particular to colour or form or eye or lip or graceful curls; there was a peculiar charm and a grace in everything about her and the whole woman, as she sat there before me, thrilled with love the man's heart within my breast. I felt I had in a way realised my dream and ever after, in her presence,

"Love took up the harp of life and smote on all the chords with might,
Smote the chord of self that trembling passed in silence out of sight;
Love took up the glass of time and held it in his glowing hands,
Every moment, lightly shaken, ran itself in golden sands"

for me. But my passion, at that innocent period of my life, was purer than snow: there was

no carnal thought or fancy in it and it was infinitely purer and deeper than what I had felt for the dancing woman. It was enough for me to live in the same village with her and breathe the same happy air she breathed. To touch the hem of her garment was a transcendent beatitude I never dreamt of attaining. It was indeed

> "The desire of the moth for the star,
> Of night for the morrow;
> The devotion to something afar
> From the sphere of our sorrow."

I at once installed her in the inmost shrine of my heart as the guardian-angel of my life. I "could worship her through years of noble deeds," but never win her. To me she appeared to be a "creature too bright and good for human nature's daily food." A thought of her was enough to turn my worst inclination, in my wickedest mood, into something good and noble, and fill my soul with a peaceful sweetness and joy; and whenever in my later life I gave way to the frailties of the flesh, it was because I failed to protect myself with the charm of remembering her. I loved and love my wife most sincerely and this other love has proved to me that a man could love two women at the same time. The poet says:—

> "I know
> Of no more subtle master under heaven

Than is the maiden-passion for a maid,
Not only to keep down the base in man,
But teach high thought, and amiable words,
And courtliness, and the desire of fame,
And love of truth, and all that makes a man."

My wife and my guardian-angel enabled me to feel the full force and truth of these noble lines regretfully, for as the one was my own by right before I began to love her and the other was already beyond my wildest hopes, being for ever another's, the full motive was wanting in my "maiden-passion," the "subtle master" was at a great disadvantage in exercising his power over me, and so,—I am not all that a man ought to be.

I saw my fiancee at more leisure next day while she was going about the house and chose her, though I must admit, "for her fine glossy surface" only, as I had no opportunity of learning whether she possessed "any qualities that would wear well." Her opinion of me was of course never asked or considered and so the marriage was arranged to take place within a fortnight.

I shall record only one curious thing that occurred during this marriage. My step-uncle and preceptor Mahadevan of course attended it and then, he saw my guardian-angel, who was indeed my wife's sister-in-law. I was anxious to learn how the idol of my heart was regarded by my ideal of a man. I saw at once that Mahadevan

who, by the way, posed to be a connoisseur of female beauty, was greatly struck at hers, though he did not speak to me about her. But, to my infinite sorrow and anger, I overheard him speaking so lightly and coarsely of her to a friend of his, that my heart rose in rebellion and "with the little godliness I had, I did full hard forbear him."

Chapter the Tenth.

WHICH AFTER SLIGHTLY ALLUDING TO SOME PRACTICAL CHANGES, RECORDS SOME REFLECTIONS OF A LATER PERIOD.

WHEN I rejoined my uncle in Madras, he was studying for engineering and had a whole house and establishment of his own. He had a friend with him as co-tenant and they kept a common servant who was a Mahratta-Sudra and lived on the premises in two of the back rooms. This servant did everything for them including coffee, tea and other refreshments. The two main meals alone were brought by a Brahmin servant from a hotel in the same street. With all my free-thought and socialism, it took me a week to fight out and subdue the sentimental aversion to partake of refreshments prepared by non-Brahmin hands. But, I soon got over all that and extended my patronage freely even to restaurants and refreshment rooms under Pariah management, though my orders were confined to toddy-leavened bread, ice-cream, tea, coffee, cakes, biscuits, kola, soda, lemonade and the like and never comprised animal food or alcohol. I believe my uncle had less scruples, when not burdened with my company.

As I was too young for any professional course, I joined one of the colleges and began to study

for the Arts degree and at my uncle's suggestion, I took up mathematics as my 'optional subject.' I need not here record how many times I was cheated by the jutka-wallahs,[1] before I finished my sight seeing in Madras; for, that was nothing to the bodily disappearance of my purse, containing over fifty rupees in cash and paper-currency, while strolling one evening in the *Gujili*[2] near a second-hand book-stall, when I thought it was quite safe in my vest pocket.

The superficial life of a student in Madras will probably be known to every one who is likely to read these pages. Some of our professors were kind and others indifferent; some of them were very able and others inefficient. We students discussed them freely and even dubbed them with nicknames. But one great missionary teacher[3] in whose college[4] I studied for one year only,[5] left a lasting impression on my mind. He is by far the greatest scholar and teacher among them all; but the remuneration he enjoys is less than a

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[1] The 'cabmen' of Madras. Ed.

[2] A bazaar in Madras which is very busy in the evenings. Ed.

[3] The Rev. Dr. William Miller, C.I.E. Ed.

[4] The Madras Christian College.

[5] T. G. changed his college twice during the Arts course. Ed.

moiety of what some other less able men obtain. He left his dear land and dearer family in his youth and is spending his life in this distant and strange land with no other wife than the goddess of learning and no other children than his innumerable pupils. Leading the simple life of a lonely student, he saves a part of even his small wages and spends this and much of his ancestral fortune in improving his college and in providing for the needs and comforts of his beloved 'boys.' He has immense faith in man and in the spread of knowledge, and his heart is full of the milk of human kindness. In those days, his noble life of self-sacrifice and philanthropy shone like a magnificent beacon-light on a lonely rock amidst the young minds tossed about and floundering below in a dark and tempestuous sea of gross materialism, selfish utilitarianism and all-devouring unbelief. Now that I gaze upon that noble life of more than a generation in length, so rich and lasting in its effects, so pure and high in its aims, I thank my god that I had the privilege of being brought under its influence for at least an year. And when I turn round and behold some other missionaries in the land, with their fashionable wives and numerous children; their mansion-like bungalows and summer hill-resorts; their coaches and phætons, bicycles and jinrickshaws;

their princely retinue of male and female servants and dogs and other pet animals; their blue-blooded noses that fly up sniffing in the air at the approach of a native and their superior aloofness from the heathen society around them; their temporal influence which is as high as their spiritual influence is low and which they frequently bring to bear on public affairs, including even the course of law and justice; their petty schisms and stupid intolerance; their trading enterprises and shooting excursions; in short, when I reflect on their one thousand and one unchristian cares, pleasures and pastimes, clearly indicating a full and unstinted enjoyment of worldly life in all its variety as far as could be commanded by money, furnished by a distant and deluded charity, I cease to wonder that they have made so little progress in their evangelical mission; that they have yet made so faint an impression on intelligent India with a keen reason and an ancient philosophy, which regards the killing out of all desires and the completest self-abnegation as the only paths to salvation; that they have as yet gathered within their fold mostly a small portion of the miserable, semi-barbarous, starving dregs of Indian society, neglected and tyrannised by an inhumanly worked system of caste. I am not ignorant of the immense material good which even

these missionaries have done to the country and are still doing and I know that they have played and still play a very important part in spreading broadcast western education and culture over this land, at a most opportune moment. India's best thanks are due to them for this, as also for their serving as an object-lesson of worldly success. But I have no patience with them as spiritual teachers, as evangelists of the great and gentle heart that perished on the cross. A Peter the Hermit might succeed in spreading Christianity in India, but a missionary of the modern type, whose worldly prosperity is often envied by the best paid native servants of the state, never; and the sooner this is recognised and the missionary calls himself by some less misleading and more appropriate name, the better for all concerned. This ancient people,—but, it must [illegible]ted, the pre-Adamite apes are certainly more ancient,—this ancient people is already groaning under a heavy heritage of shams, hypocricies and make-believes and can hardly submit to fresh importations of foreign manufacture into its sacred soil.

I did not make many friends among my fellow-students. My class was too big, and outside the college halls, we rarely met one another, as we were dispersed over a large city. In the college,

we had some debating societies wherein we discussed such important and useful topics as the propriety of the assassination of Charles I. of England, the superiority of a republic over a constitutional monarchy, the real causes which led to the fall of the first Napoleon, the rights of a lawyer to defend a murderer whom he personally knew to be guilty, the advisability of giving Indian women an University education side by side with men, and the principles of free-trade and universal suffrage, and gravely passed our resolutions thereon. I took an eager part in these debates and my mastery of Ing[illegible]'s rhetoric often brought me deafening cheers from my comrades. My usual reticence and reserve in private life gave a zest to my public speeches and rendered them all the more important in my eyes. O thou departed shade of Ingersoll! Or rather, O ye worms and vermin that were once Ingersoll, for did he not deny all *post-mortem* shades and spirits? I owed ye much, more to regret than to be thankful for. Of all your numerous orations and philipics and tilts with Talmage which I once knew by heart and gloried in reciting, I remember but one passage now and I shall record it here in absolute discharge of all my debts to you: "If, when beauty fades, thought, that deft and unseen sculptor, hath not left his subtle lines upon the

face, then, all is lost; no charm is left; the light is out; there is no flame within to glorify the wrinkled clay." No wonder that such a speaker dazzled and charmed the bright imagination of impressionable youth.

Chapter the Eleventh.

WHICH THE PRUDE AND THE INNOCENT READER MAY PASS OVER.

WHEN I went home for the summer holidays, my uncle did not accompany me, but chose to remain in Madras. I spent some weeks at Thillai in luxurious laziness, petted, fondled and gorged by my mother. Before I returned to Madras, I went to my wife's village to honor her people with my company for a few days. I saw a good deal of my wife then, and though we were not allowed to talk to each other, we did much innocent courting with our eyes, when we thought no one was observing it. When anybody remarked about it, there was pleasant confusion and blushing and she ran away. For, it must be noted, that as she never stood or sat or in any way remained near me or in my presence, all our wooing had to be done when she was coming along the street to her house from a neighbour's or from the canal carrying water, and I happened to be sitting in the front verandah of the house, and then we had an occasion to slyly look at each other for a few moments, until she vanished into the house. I noticed, or at least fancied, that she slowered her pace on seeing me and looked at me bashfully and smiled, whenever I was quite alone on such occasions. Once I grew very bold and spoke to

her; but the dear creature ran away with smiles and blushes, fairly astonished at my audacity. She was now fast growing into a woman and I felt I loved her immensely. It is true she was illiterate and our parents promptly vetoed my humble suggestion that she should be sent to school or taught at home. But I thought that this could be set right soon when she came to live with me, and I was glad to see that she was already clever in all domestic avocations and had a fine voice capable of rich development. Gazing daily with admiration and affection on her beautiful and innocent face and observing her naive and charming behaviour towards me, I promised myself a rare measure of conjugal felicity and built many a magnificent and gorgeous temple in my imagination, in all of which she was enthroned as the presiding goddess in the holy of holies and I was an ardent and devout worshipper, without let or other company. I made a sacred and very elaborately worded vow within myself to keep my heart and frame absolutely pure for her sake, so that, when she came to my arms, I might be able to clasp her to a heart as spotless and loving as her own. With her matchless beauty ever before my mind's eye, I thought it would be impossible for me to break that vow, even if I ever attempted to do so. Looking back on the innocent bliss

and the fond, hopeful dreams of those few days, I now feel that I was never before or after, happier in my life. True, there was within my heart that other love for my guardian-angel, which waxed only stronger and holier with my closer acquaintance with her during this period; but it was too serene, too platonic to affect the genuine conjugal love for my wife. It was my ideal and altogether beyond my reach; had it been lower, it would not have been my ideal. For, as the poet asks pithily and most wisely,

> "Ah! but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
> Or what is a Heaven for?"

When the time came for my quitting the village which contained the two idols of my heart, I consoled myself with the thought that I was going to equip myself for a life-long happiness with one of them and that the eyes of both will not fail to shine brightly on my successful career. At that time, my heart truly echoed the noble sentiments of Byron:—

> "O Fame!—if I e'er took delight in thy praises,
> 'Twas less for the sake of thy high-sounding phrases,
> Than to see the bright eyes of the dear one discover
> She thought that I was not unworthy to love her.
> There chiefly I sought thee, there only I found thee;
> Her glance was the best of the rays that surround thee;
> When it sparkled o'er aught that was bright in my story,
> I knew it was love, and I felt it was glory."

So when I returned to Madras, I was almost a

changed youth and applied myself to my studies with such assiduity, in quest of what fame was open to me at the time, that I was soon laid up with a severe attack of fever. My uncle was away on professional business for a few days, surveying the outskirts of Madras and taking levels of the uneven country. But I got better under good medical aid and the kind nursing of my uncle's friend and co-tenant who was fond of me and with whom I behaved with less reserve than with my uncle. He was a clerk in a mercantile office and a good, genial soul. He had not yet returned from his office one afternoon during my convalescence, when I awoke from a deep slumber and felt very thirsty. I called out to our Mahratta man-of-all-work, Runga, in vain, and when I impatiently shouted out a second and a third time, a young Brahmin girl came out of the servant's rooms and bashfully replying that Runga had gone out on some business, stood behind a pillar half hiding her person from my view and asked what I required. I said I wanted some water to drink and she went away to fetch it. I was quite at sea as to who she was and how she happened to be there. She was young, not more than seventeen perhaps, and though she was not beautiful, she was handsome enough and had all the attractive charms which youth and robust

health give to women at her period of life. She could not be Runga's wife as she was a Brahmin, and I was not aware that he kept a mistress in his rooms. In fact, I had been in the house for over a fortnight and had not the least suspicion that there was also a woman in it. When she returned with a tumbler of water and gave it to me, her hand touched mine though I avoided it and then she artfully blushed and smiled again, which, along with the touch, sent a new and a powerful thrill into my frame. I was very much excited and my heart pulsed wildly. Falteringly and with some confusion, I asked her who she was. She replied that she was living with Runga, that she had often seen me and longed very much to know me and talk to me and she ended by thrusting her tiny plump hand into my shirt to feel whether I then had the fever on me. I caught her wildly in my arms and clasped her to my bosom.

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The moment she left me, I was another man. I had eaten of the forbidden fruit and its aftertaste was unbearable. O the bitterness of that hour! I can never, never forget it. The images of my wife and of my guardian-angel now came rushing into my mind with their sorrowing and reproachful looks, which tormented me like poisoned shafts. The disgrace of a broken vow op-

pressed me heavily. I felt I had irretrievably lost the immortal part of myself and that what remained of me was bestial. I could never, never more dream of presenting my wife with a heart as pure and innocent as her own. Our nuptial bed could nevermore be the pure, virgin elysium which had been the one sweet subject of my early and my wakeful dreams. My name, which was a moment before as fresh as Dian's visage, was now begrimed and black beyond repair. O the pity of it!

> "The days will grow to weeks, the weeks to months,
> The months will add themselves and make the years,
> The years will roll into the centuries,
> And mine will ever be a name of scorn."

What would she think of me now, the beautiful girl-wife who smiled so sweetly and bashfully and who gently pressed my hand as an ever-to-be-remembered token of her love, during the wedding and the subsequent religious ceremonies, when we had to stand side by side and hand in hand, before the sacred fire? And what would that other—my guardian-angel—think of me, when she too became aware of my spotted skin? For I had not the least doubt of being pointed to as a sinner by any one who looked at my face; I felt it was indelibly engraved on it and that I could never change it.

O what had I done, indeed! for a momentary pleasure, I had irremediably wrecked the whole happiness of my life! And as if to pour oil into a blazing fire and undeceive me of any plea of real love for me on her part, which my mind might invent to make the sin look less heinous and the blot on my name less black, the wily destroyer of my innocence and bliss came back to my bed and sitting by my side and leaning on me, asked me for a loan of a couple of rupees, to be returned after a week. I was not first aware of her coming; and when I awoke from my remorseful reverie and looked upon her face, pushing rudely aside her caressing arms, she returned my look for a moment and then hastily retreated in fear and left me alone. For I had then been deeply meditating on a murderous revenge on her and on my uncle, who had so thoughtlessly placed her in my way, and crowning it with self-destruction. I thought to let my guardian-angel and my wife to know, that if I was found weak enough to sin, I was still strong enough to repent and suffer the penalty of the sin and thus command their sorrowing admiration and regard, rather than live on in self-humiliation and shame. The girl's words only made my thoughts all the more bitter; for, I fully realised that I had for ever sold for a pleasure worth a couple of rupees,

the life-happiness of two human beings, which I would not willingly have surrendered for a couple of the richest gold mines in Kolar. Well, the sin had been sinned and I now had the privilege only to pay for it. I was a free man, an intelligent man, a disciple of Ingersoll and Braudlaugh and Besant and Huxley and Tyndall and Draper and other great men, a man who had reasoned out for himself and dared to deny the existence of a god, and dared to call before his bar for judgment, the ancient and honored institutions of his country; and it was only just, that such an intellectual giant, should blame a weak, illiterate little girl who sold her body for a few mouthfuls of daily food, or an uncle who was at least seven good English miles away at the time, for a sin committed by himself and which no one in the wide earth could have possibly forced on him! I smiled grimly at this thought and determined to put an end to my life as the sinner alone should pay for the sin; but before I did so, I was desirous that my uncle should know that he was at least the partial cause of it. There was a gruesome pleasure in that and one always likes to figure as a martyr; so I decided to wait for his friend's return, to tell him everything and then rid this earth of my hateful and unworthy existence.

By the time my uncle's friend returned from his

office late in the evening, I had worked myself up into such a delirious frenzy, that he found me in a high fever and at once fetched the doctor. As it was a sudden and an unaccountable relapse, the doctor too was somewhat anxious, and on his advice, a messenger was sent for my uncle. I was rather glad at this; for I thought I would be saved the trouble of a suicide. The fever gradually rose and I was in a raving delirium when my uncle returned. He was greatly alarmed at my condition and telegraphed to my parents. During the delirium, I was told afterwards that I accused my uncle and his friend of conspiring to spoil and seduce my virgin innocence, to make me an unscrupulous libertine like themselves and also that I blabbered of the girl, pitying and praising and blaming her by turns. What else I raved about, especially about my wife and my guardian-angel, I could never learn from them; but, when I regained my consciousness and my parents arrived on the third day, both the Mahratta servant and the Brahmin girl had left the house and I never again met them anywhere. My kind parents, who had been constantly in tears and never broken fast since the reaching of the telegram, wept tears of joy on seeing me alive and stayed with us for about a fortnight, till I was able to attend college again.

Chapter the Twelfth.

WHICH, AFTER SOME REFLECTIONS, RAPIDLY RECORDS MY TRANSFORMATION IN LIFE.

THE fever left me very weak in body and there was a corresponding mental weakness, in which I unconsciously abandoned all thoughts of suicide. At times, the sin seemed a mere dream, a hallucination of the brain; but on other occasions, it came upon the mind with all the force and reality of a fresh commission of it and made my blood boil over with shame and remorse. My father had not seen Madras before; but a fortnight's residence and observation shewed him the temptations I was exposed to in it. He never liked my uncle much and always feared some disgrace to the fair name of the family from his wayward character. He now suspected that I had been partly spoiled by him and looking around for other accommodation for me, he found students living in the houses of dancing women and in worse places, and that most of the hotel-keepers helped, and even allured, the monied ones among their youthful boarders, into temptation and evil. In his eyes, only the few poor students, who managed to study by means of private charity, or small earnings from spending a portion of their spare time in teaching the children of rich men, or free-scholarships and the like, were free from

temptation and vice, in the middle of the great city. Further, my uncle was to leave Madras next year, even if it were advisable to leave me longer under his charge. So after a brief sojourn at Thillai to settle some family affairs, my father returned with the whole family to Madras, to keep a home for me. Oh for the good, sound, manly heart within him! He had never heard of Draper or Huxley, but yet, he was a far better man than many a certificated product of western culture. He always walked in fear of god and love of his fellow-man and never cared much to enquire into the why and the wherefore of this inexplicable world. He had few or no doubts as to his duties in life;

> "For, in conflicting doubts,
> The secret promptings of the good man's soul
> Are an unerring measure of the truth."

And so he lived his allotted span and joined his forefathers, a noble example of a vanishing type of Indian humanity.

But to resume: I was very happy in the bosom of my family and learnt a good deal from the garrulous and opinionated grand-dame Nauny, from my stern but soft-hearted father who was ever busy with his daily ablutions, prayers and Sanskrit studies, from my silent, angelic mother who was my ideal of a Hindu wife, and even from

my little sprightly sister, whom I shall call Komalam. Looking back now on that period of my collegiate course, so rich and fruitful in study, so tenderly encompassed by all homely comforts, and above all, so free from temptations of vice and folly, I am overwhelmed with regret that my father did not think of it a little earlier, and that I had not thus been spared that humiliating sin, which, once destroying my self-respect and rudely shattering the confidence in my moral strength, for ever weakened the ambition to keep myself unsullied and thus paved the way for later moral degradation. For, it is a stern truth, you can throw sands in the eyes of the whole world and cheat it, but you can never cheat yourself, unless you wilfully shut your eyes and refuse to see. It is a bitter lesson, I have bitterly learnt; and I record it here for the benefit of my young friends, bearing what heart-pain none of them can ever know, and beseech them to keep watch over their purity, night and day, with lidless eyes, if they care for real happiness in life. We in this land have practically no old bachelors or maids. Marriage is a religious duty with us and our happiness lies therefore only within the four sacred walls of the home; and in married life, his alone will be the supreme bliss who could consciensciously say to the wife of his bosom: "I was ever virgin

save for thee." Beware, then, beware of what you do. But my heart melts with pity for the hundreds of young men who, at the most critical period of their lives, are drawn away from all good influences and scattered about in unwholesome cities and towns, teeming with vice and sin in all their most fascinating and seductive garbs; and I seem to implore them to do what is almost impossible. For a voice from among them seems to say, "What is it you want us to do? The custom of early marriage and the tropical sun turn our thoughts, all too early, into undesirable currents; and here we are, untrammelled and uncontrolled, by any sort of supervision outside the college walls, far away from what little of good influence there may be in a home presided over by an illiterate but at least virtuous mother, in the midst of dazzling and seductive allurements in all possible shapes, and, above all, with no sort of public opinion even, to keep us within cable-length. Have we lived for nothing then for months and years here, that we should not know something of the private lives of many of your great men, the topmost cream of the country, the mighty organ-voices of public platforms and council-chambers? Look, if you dare, into yonder rattling coach-and-pair, and tell me whether the two beaming eyes within belong to the wife of

the honoured owner. Why, man, those very eyes beamed on *me* yesternight and what wonder if, basking in their light, I was happy and proud? Say you that *their* private lives are not public property? Well, then, no more are *ours*. And as for our wives you talk of, why, have we not in a way trained many of them too not to mind such things, to be happy and contented with any favours we may be pleased to shew them occasionally? Out, man, out with it and be candid for once and admit the truth, that personal purity among males is as low as female chastity is high, and that a man who would kill his wife on the spot for smiling on a stranger, would not scruple to flirt with a mistress in his own house and under his wife's very nose. And as for ourselves, you know the average man naturally longs for female company and society and what such society have we? Our wives, mothers, and sisters, are superstitious and ignorant idiots at the best; and even they are not available for us as company during our college days. No virtuous female in the city would look at our faces or talk to us; and some of us at least are not quite so enamoured of binomial theorems and differential calculus, or even about what this hero did and his grand-father did not, as to spend all our time with these. We are men and have social instincts and until you provide for us a better and

a more who..lesome company, we shall associate with whosoever may be available."

"Nay, that's certai.. ; but yet the pity of it, Iago!
O Iago, the pity of it, Iago!"

On finally taking my de..gree, after an.. fail..re, came the necessity for ..hoosing .. ..ession. My father urged me to stu.. ..fe.. ; but I had a sinc..ere aversion for the ..on, as I thought that ve.. .. few could e.. livelihood by it, without directly .. lying .. covertly prevaricating. My bias was ..nded mainly on certain opinions I had met with in the course of my studies and I quote them below, .. a curiosity :—

1. It is immoral "that a man should, with a wig on his head and a band round his neck, do for a guinea what, without those appendages, he would think it wicked and infamous to do for an empire,—that not merely believing but knowing a statement to be true, he should do all that he can by sophistry, by solemn asseveration, by indignant exclamation, by gesture, by play of features, by terrifying one honest witness, by perplexing another, to cause a jury to think that statement false."

2. Lawyers are "men that hire out their words and anger; that are more or less passionate according as they are paid for it, and allow their

client a quantity of wrath proportionable to the fee which they receive from him."

3. "The lawyer doth not make men good, but that their evil hurt not others: our wickedness maketh him necessary and necessity maketh him honorable."

4. "A profession where one can lie with impunity."

5. "I know, and do not love this learning;
Laws everywhere are like the taint
Of an inherited complaint;
The curse of an infected race."

It is true that there was one great opinion against all these, that "Law was one of the first and noblest of human sciences"; but even that not disinterested authority, himself a lawyer, admitted that "it was not apt, except in persons very happily born, to open and liberalize the mind exactly in the same proportion as it quickened and invigorated the understanding." It was settled that I should study for one of the learned professions: I was afraid I was too dull in mathematics for the engineering and my father would not hear of the medical, so unsuited to a Brahmin. Teaching work was neither lucrative nor to my taste. So I eventually studied for Law and in due course got "plucked" in the examination. In the meanwhile my wife had come to

live, with me, and we lived in Madras with old Nauny as my wife's chaperon, my parents having returned to Thillai. I was convinced that my failure in the law-examination was due to the change in my life; for I found, that when my beautiful, playful, little wife was by my side, the laws regulating Torts, Easements and such subjects altogether evaded my mental grasp. Further, I began to spend some time daily in teaching my wife, in spite of the loud and voluble protests of grand-dame Nauny. My wife learnt the Tamil and the English alphabets in a couple of months and I commenced teaching her both the languages simultaneously. I was determined not to rest satisfied until she was able to read the *Kural*, the *Kambaramayanam*, the plays of Shakespeare, the poems of Byron and Tennyson and such other works with me. I devised a new, comprehensive method of teaching, and grammar went on side by side with literature. But at the end of the first year of her study, I found I had been teaching her only the conjugations of the verb 'to love' in both the languages, as well as in the mute, gesture-language of the eyes; also, I got "plucked" in my own examination, as already stated. My wife's constitution was naturally very robust; but it broke down gradually and she got attacks of nervous headaches and hysteria. So

I had to place her under the very costly treatment of a European physician.

I was now nearing my twenty-fifth birthday, the age after which men are not entertained in Government service, and as there appeared no prospect of my ever taking my degree in Law, I decided to enter the service of the Government, and obtaining my father's previous sanction thereto, secured the appointment of a probationary Inspector of Police, with the kind recommendation of one of my European teachers and the fact of my being a B.A. and a 'failed B.L.' to boot. I was first posted to learn work under an able and experienced Inspector in one of the District stations and thither I proceeded to take charge of my appointment, with my sick wife, her old chaperon, a file of medical prescriptions and a whole box full of medicines, patent and special.

Chapter the Thirteenth.

WHICH COMPARES SOME FANCIES AND FACTS.

AS my shrewd uncle had remarked, I was somewhat of a 'poetical dreamer,' and my natural reserve and domesticity had left me undisturbed in my dreams hitherto. As a student, I had the most exalted notions of justice, equality of the sexes, liberty of the individual, putting one's convictions into practice and the like. My speeches in our debating societies had developed these ideas within me, and when I promised to the University Chancellor to conduct myself befittingly in life while receiving my Arts diploma at his hands, it was not a mere lip promise but a most solemn and sincere one which I intended to redeem by my conduct in life. But when I took charge of my appointment and found myself face to face with life, as it really was, during the course of my daily duties, I was simply appalled at the wide gap between my fond and cherished dreams and the hard facts before me. I found justice sold by its paid dispensers and law violated by its paid guardians. I saw selfishness and corruption rampant everywhere and the first maxim which my preceptor taught me to follow as a Police officer was, to look for a selfish motive underneath everything. I came across men and women who were daily deceiving each

other in the most sacred relationships, for lust or lucre; and I soon learnt that mammon, and not intellect or character, was the idol of all. After the fetters of my mind had been broken by Ingersoll and others, I had not come across caste tyranny and class tyranny so closely; but, now, I found them very predominant and powerful. Not infrequently, the caste, class, and pecuniary worth of a criminal affected his punishment more than I ever thought they could; and the poor low-castes, who deserved the greatest pity and consideration, suffered the most. Women were illiterate and spent their time in household drudgery and small scandal; they were generally treated like chattels by their male owners and seemed to deserve no better treatment. I noticed also that among the educated upper class, envy of pelf or position was very rife and if three men ever came together, there were at least two factions among them. But above all, and owing chiefly to the great respect and adoration paid to superior wealth and power, I found that even among those who had the benefit of a good education and culture, a want of regard for truth, a proneness to indulge in flattery, an extreme lack of moral courage and straightforwardness, an uncontrollable inquisitiveness to pry into the secrets of others, and a silly officiousness, offering help to

others especially in the shape of free advice, were some patent defects in character. The interests of truth and honor, of self-respect and dignity, were sacrificed at the smallest temptation; and to crown all, there was a glorious inconsistency between practice and precept.

These stern facts, slowly borne in upon my mind, were a great shock to my golden dreams and fairly upset my mental balance at first. But I determined to hold by my solemn promise and resolved to endeavour to remedy them as far as it lay in my power. There was a native club at the place, to which the officials, the pleaders, and some teachers resorted. I became a member of this club and throwing off my reserve and reticence, began to talk to them freely, and enthusiastically about my principles and dreams of social amelioration. At first they listened to me, as though I was a *rara avis* whose note they had not heard before; and when, thus encouraged, I attempted to draw them off from their card or chess table, and substitute in their place some more intellectual and useful recreation, I was regarded as a 'bore'; and very soon, as little less than a monomaniac. I began to be shunned for my plain-speaking, and one day, the local Deputy-Collector took serious offence at my free conversation and stout disputation with him regarding

the subject of female education, in the club, where too he expected the respectful subservience shown to him in his court, as the representative of law and justice. All the other members of the club were surprised at the audacity of the probationary Inspector who treated the supreme magistrate in his division in this manner. Every one I met, began to give me the cold shoulder after this, and I thought it was best for me to resign my membership in the club and did so. Meanwhile, I had sent my wife round to visit the spouses of all the members at their houses and try to interest them in the formation of a ladies' club, for social and intellectual recreation. Only a few of the ladies returned her visit and none of them seemed to like my idea; and the only result of it was, that my wife brought to me some new and spicy scandals which had not come even within my police purview. I soon came to be spoken of as a forward and impractical youth, who did not well understand his own position, or the reverence due to his seniors in age and rank.

In my official career, I fared no better. My able preceptor understood me and my principles only too soon, and gave me a broad hint that I should mend them much, if I did not want my probation to end suddenly. Finding that, in my

earnestness to learn police work, I entered minutely into the ways and means of his subordinate officers in manipulating cases and preparing evidence, and thus not only brought many an officer to trouble but also many a case to a speedier end, he laid down the axiom that in all ordinary matters, the great secret of success was to allow the subordinate officers full freedom and not pry too inquisitively into their dealings, and forbade me to meddle with them in future. To my mind, this was nothing but conniving at their mischievous and unscrupulous conduct, and I was thinking of exposing my preceptor himself to the Superintendent, when my probation suddenly ceased in the following circumstances. There was a sitting of the sessions court, and we had two murders and four dacoities to get through. The judge was a new civilian with an inveterate prejudice against the police force in general, and the local administration of it in particular. So it was decided to get the cases convicted by forcing the hands of the judge with the help of the jurymen. All the division-inspectors were instructed to use their influence with the jurors attending from their respective jurisdictions and arrange for their verdict in these cases. There were a few jurors who were residents of the District station itself and some of them were spoken

to in a friendly manner by my chief; but still, there were three merchants left, whom we had reason to suspect as being unfavorable to us and I was deputed to the delicate task of bringing them to reason by means of the "Public Nuisance Act." I not only refused to be a party to this, but also gave a homily to my preceptor himself on the heinousness of his action. I do not know what was said of me to the higher powers; within a fortnight, I received an order intimating that my probation had ceased and that I would be sent for again when my services were required.

Chapter the Fourteenth.

WHEREIN I SUCCEED IN LIFE AND PLAY TO THE GALLERY.

WHEN I had thus played and lost the game of serving the Government of my country as a noble guardian of its peace and prosperity, and was looking around me for something to which I might next set my shoulder, I was suddenly summoned to my father's death-bed. He had been ailing for some time, but I never thought he would pass away so soon; nor until I had lost him did I fully know how sincerely and deeply I had loved him, and what trouble it was to be the managing head of a family. My dear mother's altered state, her shaven head and coarse white widow's weeds, were an unbearable sight to me; and I even regretted with her, that she had not passed away before her husband. I was now the head of my family, the only male member in it with four dear female souls depending on me. In spite of my Arts diploma, I found I was not equal to the task of making out anything of the bundles of family accounts written on palmyrah leaves and I knew not a single field owning me as lord. I invited my wife's brother, an intelligent but 'uneducated' land-lord, to help me, and he soon made out an inventory of everything. Till my father's death, I cared not where the money

he was constantly sending me, came from; for aught I knew, the rupees might have been dug out of our fields and gardens. I now learnt that my property, all told, was not worth over ten thousand rupees, and that I owed debts to the extent of six thousand to two creditors. Both my mother and grand-dame Nauny were against the sale of any portion of the ancestral property, and my mother felt so strongly about this, that I was loathe to wound her feelings and thus make her feel the loss of her beloved husband all the more bitterly. So I borrowed another thousand rupees and mortgaged the whole of my property to the two creditors for the seven thousand due to them, the property being redeemable at my will on payment of the principal. I then left Thillai with my family for the chief town in my native District, to repair my broken fortune and eke a livelihood.

As I was still an atheist, or as I proudly styled myself, an agnostic, I could not consistently perform the numerous religious ceremonies connected with my father's funeral; but partly to please my sorrowing mother, and, why hide it, partly in fear of public opinion, I submitted to them all; I also performed the monthly and the annual ceremonies, for the same reasons.

On arriving at Bamboor and settling down there

with my family, I applied myself again to my law books with a persistent diligence born of sheer necessity and the approach of the wolf to my doors, and easily qualified myself to practise as a lawyer in the local courts. I had by this time learnt much of the world and was also gradually becoming more and more adaptable to its ways and less intolerant of its hypocrisy and deceit. I changed my house for a commodious bungalow, employed a smart clerk on fifteen rupees a month, kept a bullock-coach and servant, and adopted all the paraphernalia of the busiest barrister in town, without his full and heavy brief-bag. Not that nine too was not full or heavy, but it was so with free-thought pamphlets and odd volumes of my favourite poets, rather than with dusty case files. All this show lightened my purse of a thousand rupees considerably; but I knew the world and bravely waited. One litigant after another began to enter my bungalow, and many went away disappointed, when they found that I would not take up false cases, or connive with and help them in creating evidence. But my name steadily rose in estimation, and the judges and magistrates treated me with the respect and courtesy which honesty commands in this false, deceitful world. My study of Ingersoll also stood me in

good stead; for I often silenced my opponents with his withering sarcasm and rhetoric.

In a few short years, I attained the topmost rung of the ladder, redeemed my ancestral property, was duly graced with the civic honours of being elected to the Taluq Board and the District Board, and was created a life-member of the committee entrusted with the management of the rich religious endowments in the District. In these assemblies I first discovered what a shameful farce local self-government was: Not a few of my fellow-members were almost illiterate and altogether innocent of the English tongue, in which our deliberations were held. They were wealthy and so they were elected. They cared more for the travelling allowances they obtained for attending the meetings than for the subjects discussed at those meetings, unless when they happened to hold any secret brief from any contractor to get any extravagant bill passed. They nodded their heads or raised their hands at the chairman's prompting, quite unaware as to whether they were sanctioning the opening of a new drain or the beheading of their honoured chief. The official head of the Board treated the few non-official, educated members with scant courtesy and ceremony and was very impatient when they ventured to express any opinions

clashing with his. With the strong official element in the Board and the illiterate coterie of nominated members who entirely depended on his whim for re-appointment, he invariably had the majority to back him and won the day. The only consolation was that the official head had generally more commonsense in him than the rest of the Board and rarely went against the permanent interests of the District; but, certainly, it was anything but *self*-government. In the Municipal Councils it was a deal better; but here, petty factions and strifes raged virulently and the periodical election of the chairman was their fruitful source. The system showed its worst defects and evils in the committees managing the religious endowments. These charities were very rich and afforded the committees scope for extensive patronage in appointing the trustees and managers of temples. The committees consisted mainly of the uneducated aristocracy of the land, who openly sold their patronage and connived at and shared in the plunder of the temple property by their nominees. I shall record a typical case which occurred when I was on the committee: One of the members of the committee died and two rich and influential men competed for the vacant post. One of them was already the managing trustee of one of the richest temples in the District, but

he was ready to resign that appointment, if he obtained the more lucrative committee-membership. The other competitor, a very shrewd man, negotiated with his rival and eventually succeeded in inducing him to withdraw his claims by paying him a thousand rupees. Thus he became master of the situation and was duly elected. He quietly bided his time for a few months, gaining influence and power in the meanwhile. Then he started on a sacred pilgrimage to the temple managed by his former rival. While there, he was suddenly oppressed by a sense of his duties and called for the temple accounts, to satisfy himself that the divine trust-property was not defrauded. The manager was at his wits' end, and to escape a criminal prosecution for misappropriation, he promptly returned the thousand rupees which he had extorted before, with interest at twelve per cent! In these committees, the vested interests were so strong and the odds against me so powerful, that I soon severed my connection with them rather than pollute myself by remaining a helpless witness of a shameless and systematic pillage of property, which might be so usefully spent in spreading education and otherwise ameliorating the condition of the masses. During the short time I served on these committees, the quarrels among some of the members

for precedence in service and honour when they condescended to visit the temples, and the manner they vied with one another in winning the good graces of the dancing prostitutes attached to them, greatly amused me.

This free mingling with the world, so unlike the Himalayan aloofness of my college-days, produced its inevitable result, and my moral and intellectual tension loosened unconsciously. A cold reserve and exclusiveness, nay, even an undue self-importance and haughtiness, are excellent guardians of a man's character, however brutal they might seem as social qualities. The man who, in the language of the world, 'gives and takes,' who longs to please every one and hesitates to call a spade a spade because it might hurt the spade's feelings; in short, the society-man with his oily tongue and propitiating smile, pays a heavy penalty indeed for his popularity. Self-respect and the regard of those whose opinion is worth anything, are alike lost by him, and he soon becomes incapable of doing any real good to his fellowmen or to himself. It is a dear price paid for a mere trifle.

Chapter the Fifteenth.

WHICH DESCRIBES LIFE AT HOME AND LIFE ABROAD.

IGNORING chronology, I shall here record the salient features of my life and doings within my family circle and when outside its magic boundary. After a short illness, grand-dame Nauny had also died, and my family now consisted of my mother, my sister, and my wife and children. The Bible says that a man should leave his father and his mother and cling to his wife and so I shall speak of her first.

I have already referred to her impaired health and neuralgic complaints. She got so bad with what I and the apothecary called 'hysteria' and what the rest of my family persisted in calling 'possession by a devil,' that finding no relief in English medical aid, I had to abandon her to the tender mercies of native quacks and exorcisers and even perform for her sake such rites and ceremonies as they prescribed. The fact was, that with all my universal scepticism, I was hopelessly bewildered and perplexed at the power exhibited and the feats performed by some of these *mantravadins* and could not possibly treat them as swindlers and quacks. My wife would sometimes lie like a piece of stone or wood, without any apparent sign of life, for some hours

together; inhalations and hypodermic injections would prove of no avail whatever; then the exorciser would come and mutter something within himself and throw a pinch of ashes on her corpse-like body, when, lo! she would suddenly sit up and begin to converse with him and relate wild stories of ghosts and devils. Hypnotism or mesmerism or any other-ism, it was a stern fact that some of those 'quacks' possessed some wonderful powers and I was not unwilling to take advantage of it. This went on for over three years and the money spent on it during the period was a trifle when compared with the intense mental anxiety and agony I suffered. Eventually, I had to make a pilgrimage to Rameswaram with all my family and perform some very costly ceremonies there. My wife's health improved on our return, and she has never since been so hysterical or devilish. The brutal manner in which she was flogged by one of the exorcisers during her fits was horrid and makes me shudder even now when I think of it. By the time she recovered somewhat of her former health, she had forgotten even the Tamil and the English alphabets and so I had to commence again from the very foot of the ladder. I soon found that while she was rather dull and perhaps too old to learn, I was very impatient and not quite an exemplary

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teacher and so there were frequent misunderstandings and mutual accusations. To avoid all this, I engaged a teacher for her, but my mother would on no account permit her to learn under him, as he was a male, though a pretty old man, in all conscience. Then, with the greatest difficulty and at a fabulously high price, I secured the services of a female teacher; but, again, my mother refused to allow her into the house, as she was a Pariah and a Christian. I was extremely vexed at this, and for the first time in my life, I had a quarrel with my mother over it. This was unbearable, but I was firm. So I ordered that my wife should meet the female teacher for an hour daily in my office-room, which was a little apart from the house. My mother could not object to this, but she made her daughter-in-law go to the tank and have an expiatory bath before she re-entered the house after her polluting tuition. In these circumstances and owing to the very poor attainments of her tutoress herself, my wife did not make much progress in her studies and with the advent of children and other domestic cares, even that show was given up and she remains to this day a more or less illiterate piece of humanity. I cannot adequately describe how much this vexed me once and how loath I was to abandon all my dreams of enjoying the sweets of

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Kamban and *Shakespeare* in her company. I entreated her, exhorted her, threatened her; and she too, poor girl, did really make more than one sincere attempt to recover lost ground; but, all to no purpose. She was dull, too old to learn and burdened with a thousand little cares and anxieties; there were no facilities for educating one in her position and there were innumerable obstacles; altogether, the odds were hopelessly against us, and so the sands of time have drunk up my sweet, sparkling cup of youthful dreams.

Personally, I hate all artificiality: a woman pleases me most in her natural beauty, and the more jewels she wears, the less she delights my eyes. Of course, my wife and my mother were of a different opinion. When they wanted any particular jewel made, my board was made a school, my bed a shrift, until they had it. I was at first very stubborn and self-willed: but when the passion of love had spent itself somewhat and I grew more and more indifferent towards its object, I yielded to their wishes in a spirit of tolerance and regard for individual predilections. For one reason and another, nearly half of my property is now in the shape of jewels and I am quite indifferent to it.

My wife first gave birth to a series of three daughters. She was extremely disappointed and

annoyed at this, and under my mother's injunctions and the advice of some astrologers and old widows, she began keeping certain fasts and penances and also the worship of the *Aswastha*[1] tree and the snake-god. Her superstitions increased in number and strength gradually and frequently clashed with my comforts and wishes. She had always been a very obedient wife, except when jewels or books were on the board, and so this considerable addition to the 'standing differences' was a matter of great alarm to me. Further, as I was a professed sceptic, I did not like that my wife should figure in the eyes of my acquaintances as an ultra-superstitious woman. But my remonstrances were not of much avail, as my mother was a tower of strength to her.

These little things, one after another, as time passed by and her beauty waned and no fresh charms appeared to keep our love whole and inviolate, caused some dissatisfaction and discord, 'a little rift within the lute which, by and by, shall make the music mute.' 'To be wroth with one we love doth work like madness in the brain.' Fresh solderings followed lamentations and regrets and for a time made us forget and forgive our mutual faults. But our first love was like a rock, and so when that was once rent asunder,

[1] A variety of the Indian fig tree, known as 'king-tree.' Ed.

complete reunion was physically impossible. I waxed more and more indifferent to her wishes and from a gallant knight-errant whose one law was his lady-love's command and who was ready to lay down his life to gratify her least desire, I became an ordinary Hindu husband, who loved his wife in a way, but, generally treated her with little consideration or regard. I will not have it understood that I ceased to love my wife; far from it; I loved her and still love her more than I love any other woman. Nay, I never loved any other woman, except my guardian-angel, and that was indeed a different kind of love. Our beloved children too have greatly strengthened the love-bond between us. But yet, it is not the same love that I felt for her once, that I fancied I would carry to my grave, intact and unimpaired. The lode-star of life was for ever gone; the guiding rudder at home was often out of gear; the conscience-compass was hopelessly out of order; no wonder the pilot steered his bark now this way and now that, almost recklessly, and never satisfied either with himself or his surroundings. During the few fitful moments of high self-communion in those regretful days, I used to lay my misdemeanours at my wife's doors and think that if only *she* had been after my own heart, I would have been a different man. It was perhaps true. But now

that I reflect on it, the fallacy of the argument, invented no doubt by the innate desire to appear as a martyr, is quite plain to me. For, while she had more reasons to be dissatisfied with me, she showed less change in her love and general behaviour and has been spotlessly true, in thought, word and deed, to my unworthy self. Her unlettered heart has been proved to be of pure gold, and my diplomed one, of tinsel. She never swerved an inch from her higher duties and so, thank god, she was able to save me at the end. I have written more than I ever intended to, more than perhaps the world would care to know or ought to know. But let it be.

My saintly mother, robed in her great sorrow, was my ideal of a Hindu wife, and I was determined to be a good and loyal son to her. Her word was my law in most matters and I often sacrificed the dictates of my conscience in obeying her. The world around me was full of hypocrisy, mutual cheatings and self-delusions, and in such a world I thought conscience could go to the wall in such petty affairs as my mother's wishes generally related to. One day she said that, before she died, she would like to see me performing my daily ablutions and prayers regularly. I was an atheist; but I wished to gratify her wish. So I purchased a book of

those prayers, having forgotten them long ago, and performed my religious duties in the most orthodox fashion, to the no small amusement of my friends and neighbours. I held strong views about the evils of giving alms to the able-bodied poor; but in deference to my mother's wishes, there was no 'nay' said to any beggar who came to our threshold and the loathsome opposite of all my heart was acted daily. There was no end to the religious rites and ceremonies performed in my house, and in not a few of them I had to take an active part with as much grace as I could put on for the occasion. It would be tedious and unprofitable to recall to mind all the occasions when we disagreed in our opinions and I submitted to be led by her. Nay, it would be ungrateful to do so, for what is there in our fleeting, butterfly existence that is too valuable or too important to be sacrificed at a mother's bidding?

I have already spoken of my little sister. When she was five years of age, my parents married her to the son of a wealthy land-lord. Four years later, the boy died of fever and my darling Komalam became a widow, before she knew what it was to love or to be loved. She was a bright, intelligent girl, very handsome, and of a cheerful disposition, full of fun and frolic. Her fate caused

my poor mother the greatest anxiety and grief. I was for getting her remarried; but, of course, my mother would sooner have murdered her with her own hands, and so the poor, innocent girl endured her fate. Many years after, when my mother had passed away, I again tried to get my sister remarried. No orthodox youth would marry her and no English-educated young man would marry her and incur social ostracism. A wreck in life, one who had tried his hands at almost everything and failed in all owing to lightness of character and innate stupidity, offered to marry her if I would give her a dowry of ten thousand rupees. My only motive was to make her happy in life, and so I consulted her wish; but, with unexpected good sense, she refused to wed such a man and also pointed out that if I got her remarried, no one would wed my numerous daughters who were fast growing to marriageable age. I then endeavoured to form a coterie of social reformers, imbued with the same high motives and bound together by common interests and aims, who could face and successfully withstand any social ostracism and be the noble pioneers of a less custom-bound and more enlightened posterity. But, alas! of the one hundred and odd likely persons whom I carefully selected and addressed on the subject privately

by letter, at an enormous waste of my time, stationery and energy, only ten gentlemen deigned to reply to me, and they were unanimously of opinion that my idea, however advisable and necessary it might be, was, at the then state of our society, altogether impracticable. So much for my toil and trouble.

I had daughters and subsequently also sons, both in plenty. In my caste, boys were purchased in marriage and girls had to be heavily endowed, and the higher the social status of the father, the more he was expected to pay the bridegroom for his daughter. In this at least I meant to have my own way and sent my girls to school and also got them tutored at home, thinking that any educated youth would only be too glad to marry them on account of their rare education and beauty. From the seventh birth-day of my eldest daughter, my mother and my wife commenced worrying me about her marriage. My mother said, as usual, that she wished to see her Kamala married before she died; but I made light of it and replied that I could not afford to see her die so soon and so would keep her alive as long as possible by keeping Kamala unmarried. I was not able to put off the marriage in this manner for more than a couple of years longer, and in her ninth year I was forced to seek a son-

in-law. I went to Madras for this purpose, visited all the colleges, and selected three youths of my caste and sub-sect. One of them had to be given up as *Sagothri.*[1] Of the other two, one astonished me by bluntly asking me whether I would give my daughter a dowry of a thousand rupees. I bid him farewell and stuck to the other who hinted only that he would expect me to help him with money during his B.L. course. Then the horoscopes had to agree; though, for my part, I consider astrology only as the high water-mark of human impudence and self-importance; and as one astrologer expressed some doubts on this point, I deliberately destroyed my Kamala's horoscope and pleaded ever after that I had failed to get a horoscope framed at the time of her birth and had not noted the necessary particulars for framing one subsequently. The boy's father was written to and agreed to the marriage, and before I left Madras, Kamala's *fiance* somehow persuaded me to purchase for him a bicycle for three hundred rupees. Under my mother's superintendence, the

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[1] A *gothram* denotes a common ancestry, from some great ancient Rishi; so, marriage among persons of the same *gothram* amounts to incest and is prohibited. *Gothrams* descend in the male line only and the 'twice-born' alone observe it. Ed.

marriage cost me two thousand rupees, besides Kamala's jewels, and presents to the bridegroom.

My religious scepticism was purely speculative; so also were most of my staunch opinions on sociology and ethics: they had not the remotest bearing on my daily conduct. Practical experience soon convinced me that public opinion was too strong on some points to be successfully resisted or ignored by any one individual, while it altogether neglected others which were of far greater importance and more relevantly within its province, in my judgment. All that was expected was only an outward observance of certain practices which were the now meaningless relics of a remote civilisation. As long as I wore the holy thread and did not interdine openly or intermarry with a non-Brahmin, I was regarded as a Brahmin and allowed all the privileges of that exalted caste. A few minor observances won me the esteem of being an orthodox gentleman and invariably, mammon was effective in hiding many a glaring fault. I could be an adulterer, a rake, a drunkard, a thief of sacred trust-property, a cheat, a liar and a perjurer, with perfect impunity; the public gave me the longest cable and freedom of action in such affairs; but if I chose to crop my hair close, or to grow a mustache, or wear a hat, or remove my holy

thread, or refused to shave off the beautiful hair of my young, widowed sister, or ventured to take my wife out for a drive in an open dogcart, or made her wear shoes or use an umbrella when she went out in the sun, the sage public disowned me altogether and made it too hot for me to remain in their midst. I could beat and starve my wife and keep twenty mistresses in my house under her very nose; but she could not talk with any of my male friends or sit in my own presence when any third person was present. The seven wonders of the world were as nothing when compared with this public opinion and the seven sages of Greece, the veriest simpletons when compared with its wisdom. I admit, to my shame, that I fully and scrupulously obeyed all the arbitrary dictates of this social despot and was also a son after my mother's own heart within my family circle.

But in public, while I was in my long-coat, turban and patent-leather shoes, I was a very different Govindan. Browning says that every man has two soul-sides, one to face the world with, and the other to show a woman when he loves her. Perhaps that applies to non-Indians only, for, here in India, at least three such soul-sides are indispensable. The above description of my family would have shewn that there was

not a single topic of intellectual interest which I could have possibly discussed with those dearest and nearest to my heart. They were illiterate and their minds uncultured and so they were unable to show any intelligent interest in any subject worth speaking about. Once I remember, I forgetfully plunged into the intricacies of political economy while dilating on the evils of jewelmania, and when after a lucid and unanswerable argumentation I stopped a little to take breath and gauge the opinion of my fair audience, my wife naively asked me how gold and silver jewels could be worse than gold and silver coins which were also of the same metals. Ever after, I discussed within my family circle only births, marriages and deaths, cuisine and small scandal, and reserved the rest for club-land and public platforms. In these latter, I was bold and eloquent and quite uncompromising. I advocated the most sweeping social reforms, once demanding the abolition of the caste-system by a special Act. I was a puny Brahmin who preferred a light to a heavy walking stick; but that did not prevent me from thundering against the ignominy of the Arms Act in India. All religious institutions were impartially condemned and the existing evils in the world attributed to them. The subjection of women was dolorously deplored and

their upraising and installation on an equal pedestal with man with equal rights, very touchingly prayed for. Marriages, before the contracting parties were of proper age and able to understand the responsibility of the rite, were to be abolished, and I opined that it would be better if the marriage contract was made a purely civil one, revocable at the request of either party. In short, personal freedom was advocated as much as possible and all delays in giving effect to measures conducive to it, severely deprecated. I had a heavy bundle of essays and papers in manuscript relating to this aggressive, evangelistic period of my public activity, and I solemnly cremated it two years ago, after a befitting anointment with kerosene oil.[1]

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[1] Some MSS. seem to have escaped this "cremation" and have been sent to me along with this *Autobiography*. I have them with me and may perhaps publish them later on, guided by how the public receives this. Ed.

Chapter the Sixteenth.

WHICH RECORDS MY POLITICAL TENETS.

INDIA, with all thy faults I love thee still.

That was the refrain of my imaginary apostrophe to my country. I was nothing if not a patriot, and if my death would in any way have secured greater freedom to my countrymen, I would gladly have resigned my life. In my heart, I hated all Mahomedans as the barbarians who first wrested the land from its lawful owners and by their rude and fanatical oppression, for ever crushed the noble, native virtues of the Aryans and thus paved the way for alien supremacy and dominion for almost endless ages. My heart swelled with indignation and shame when I compared the present state of my country with what it was in the golden days of Rama and Harischandra. To my mind, even the worst anarchy under the native sons of the soil was far better than the best alien rule. 'Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven,' said Milton's noble hero, Satan. So it may be presumed that I was an eager supporter of all that tended to give the country greater freedom and extremely regretted the suicidal conduct of my countrymen whenever they sacrificed their own permanent interests to personal envy, ambition or greed, by their

abuse of such privileges tardily granted by a foreign Government.

When the great Indian National Congress was first organised, I was transported with joy at the prospect of the boundless benefits which might reasonably be expected to accrue to the country from such powerful and representative agitation. I was one of the delegates from my District and my noble speech was magnificently conceived, though somewhat spoiled in after-print by the short-hand writers who reported it.

I know my friend Ramiah will smile at this; but he knows I care not for his notoriously unpatriotic opinions on political subjects. In those days he used to say that I was a typical delegate for the Congress, because I was a briefless, discontented pleader, with more time at my disposal than was good for me. He boasted of his liberal, cosmopolitan views which looked only to the progress of humanity and cared not to note who guided it towards the goal. He always harped on "that far-off divine event" of Tennyson. In a carping spirit, he quarrelled even with the name of our new movement. He said that the gathering of a few hundreds of men from among a population of over three-hundred millions was not entitled to the epithet 'great.' Then that it was not a purely Indian Congress because there

were numerous Europeans in it and its prime movers were Europeans. He criticised most the epithet 'National.' In his opinion, India was a vast continent and not at all a single country. There were hundreds of religions, languages and dialects, and thousands of races, tribes, castes, sects, and communities in it. There were not perhaps a score of delegates whose mother-tongue was the same; and not ten who could eat, drink or worship together or intermarry their daughters and sons. The Indian population was a conglomeration of several nations and no better proofs were required that the Congress was not 'National' than the elaborate arrangements made to house the delegates separately and apart from one another and the fact that the common language of this *Indian* National Congress was *English.* The name was justifiable only if it was meant to denote a Congress of some members of the several Indian nations; and these members were in no sense of the word representative of the communities they belonged to, because the vast millions of men and women who formed the huge volumes of those communities knew naught of these surging sprays on their surfaces. These masses were mostly illiterate and led a precarious hand-to-mouth existence. They never dreamt of any political privileges, and if any

of them were personally questioned by a Viceroy as to their grievances, they would probably pray for a deepening of the local tank at State cost, or for perpetual exemption for their village from its ever being converted into a 'Union' under the Local Boards Act, rather than for the repeal of the Arms Act or the appointment of native members on the executive council of the State. And among these self-constituted representative leaders who met in Congress, my friend could recognise no unity of purpose. He thought that some were there in search of power and influence, some others in search of titles from the very State whose policy they met to condemn and almost all of them for lack of other business to occupy their time; but very, very few indeed from a really noble and patriotic motive. Once he said that if he were the Secretary of State for India, he could allow the Congress-wallahs, tentatively for a fortnight, all that they asked for and more, and withdraw all the Europeans from the country, leaving it to be ruled by its representative native leaders. He was sure that so much anarchy and civil squabble would have resulted within the first week and the late fellow-delegates become such deadly enemies in the strife for the new loaves, that there would soon be another and probably a more representative Con-

gress of the Indian people to present an humble petition to the British nation, praying to be ridden over again. The effects of several centuries of practical slavery could not be wiped away in a generation and it was mad to ask for political privileges and freedom when we had enough social and religious reform-work at home for at least two centuries, work which no foreign legislation could possibly do for us. When we became the equals of Englishmen mentally, morally and physically, they could not but admit us to an equal share in governing the country, and if they were not then politic enough to do so, it would not be on speechifying platforms that we would represent our claims.. Weltering in unfathomable superstition, divided into a thousand conflicting and tyrannising castes, shamelessly selfish, with our women steeped in idiotic ignorance and pitiable servitude, with more than 90 per cent. of the population more or less illiterate and in constant dread of the wolf at their doors, grossly ignorant and incapable of all arts of war by land or sea, ever praying to the heavens for sustaining showers and childishly innocent alike of the mineral and the industrial resources of the country and of the best methods of taking advantage of those resources, with not a single interest or other bond of sympathy common to the whole country, such

policy, are also discontented to a very large extent, and if they do not openly criticise, it is because they are tongue-tied by the rules regulating their conduct as public servants.

The causes of this very undesirable state of things are worth enquiring into. Some say that the British nation has reached the zenith of its national greatness and that its change of policy in this country is only a symptom of the commencement of its down-hill course, inevitable in all human affairs, as witnessed by all extant history. Whether true or false, this is certainly not the immediate cause of the disease I am diagnosing and I shall therefore not dilate upon it.

The English came here as traders, not as colonisers. They were hard pressed by other like traders and in sheer self-preservation they fell down—to cover as much ground as possible—and wildly kicked with their legs and buffeted with their hands on all sides. When they again got up and looked round, they found that their enemies had vanished and they were masters of the field. England is a small country, smaller than the palm of the giant India's out-stretched hand and English women are very prolific. Sheer necessity has driven the Englishman abroad from his island-home and he is only too glad to get a footing anywhere. But once he plants his foot

firm, he wants all comforts and luxuries and he has infinite confidence in his own powers and none in fate. One other little whim of his is he can never be a second fiddle in any company. So with his wonderful resources and tactics, he soon became the sole monarch of India from hoary Himalay to Cape Comorin, from Afghanistan to Burmah. But he knew very little of what his task meant. He had neither red-Indians nor black Negroes to deal with here. The inhabitants were the relics of an ancient civilisation not too remote to have lost all its force and power. They were divided by religion, caste, customs and language into innumerable classes with conflicting interests. It was a Babylonian confusion to him and so he decided to stand aloof and treat them all with even justice. He would only collect his revenue and see that no crime was committed and leave all the rest to be settled among themselves. But to carry on the administration, even on such limited terms, of a vast continent like India, he wanted help and being too lazy and proud to learn the native's languages, he taught the native his language, so as to be able to command his assistance. This native was an altogether queer sort of being: alone in all human history, he had survived nearly twenty centuries of foreign invasions and rule

and what was still more wonderful and unique, he had tenaciously preserved a good deal of his ancient civilisation, though much of it hung like a clog round his neck and handicapped him wofully. Perhaps, it was through this clog that he had preserved his individuality or he might have been unidentifiably absorbed by the invaders of his country. Anyhow, during all these centuries of training, he learnt a very practical adaptiveness which enabled him to preserve himself in any sort of environment. Such adaptiveness of course presupposed the loss of certain manly virtues which are indispensable for supreme success in life; but our native had long forgotten all tastes of supremacy and was perfectly content to play a second or even a third part in life. His maximum ambition was to exist and all that came in his way over and above it, he joyfully accepted and thanked his stars therefor. The Englishman never goes to a place without the Bible. It precedes or closely follows his sword. The Christian missionary in India also began educating the sons of the soil in the hope of impounding them all into the Christian coop some ripe, later day. So between the missionary and the statesman, the Indian was given the very same education which his would-be preceptor and ruler had in his island-home. Certain moral factors, giving a

tone and a polish to that education, were alone wanting in the Indian's case and so the result too was to that extent inferior. The first to take advantage of this new culture was the Brahman. He was the highest type of Indian mankind and would not admit that the Englishman was his intellectual superior. Other less intelligent classes too soon followed in his wake as hithertofore and the country is now flooded with English-educated Indians. The Government do not want all of them to help them and they have not yet fulfilled the missionary's expectations. From a purely political point of view, it would be best if they all become Christians, for nothing else could better accelerate their national consolidation. These educated young men, mostly disappointed in their purpose of securing State employment, have read all sorts of books on sociology and constitutional history and learnt the value of political agitations. The masses being ignorant and conservative, they cannot effect much social or religious reform without great self-sacrifice, but political agitation demands no self-sacrifice and is pleasant and may prove profitable. So they raise their voices and clamour for political privileges and the Government take alarm, as all foreign Governments are only too prone to do in similar circumstances. They

think that they have unwittingly raised an army of malcontents, dangerous to their own safety. They simply meant to train some men to help them in the more mechanical part of their administrative labours; perhaps they also wished to set at rest their own national conscience which had its own ideas about their duties towards a conquered nation; they might also have intended to show the supercilious Brahman, that if *he* had an ancient civilisation and a rich literature, *they* too were not quite the savages he might be inclined to take them for and that their own literature was far richer than his boasted one in several important departments; and lastly, the eyes of the other European nations were on them and it was a point of national honor and policy to treat India fairly and in a manner worthy of the British flag. But, certainly, they did not expect this result.

The change in the State-policy is due mainly to fear and suspicion. A century of rule has not brought the Englishman much closer to his subject Indian. The Englishman treats the Indian with undisguised contempt. He is very intolerant of Indian habits and customs and expects an unreasonable conformity to his own ways and manner on the Indian's part. With some reason, he hates the Indian as a sneak and a moral coward; but he forgets that the Indian owes his

individual existence to-day solely to those adaptive qualities. The Indian on his part has not much regard for his English ruler. The Englishman made the initial mistake and lost the regard of all high-caste Hindus when, on first stepping on Indian soil, he selected his personal servants from the lowest castes of the country. This first contact with the lowest type, then and ever since, has hopelessly prejudiced his view and he is incapable of appreciating the good qualities in the higher-class Indians and of sympathising with them. To the Hindu who does not eat except with men of his own caste, the Englishman has become a Pariah. His ways and habits too, he does not much admire; nay, some of them he abhors sincerely. But all these obstacles will vanish and the adaptive Indian will become a very pleasant companion and eventually by constant contact and example a very different type of man morally, if only the Englishman will treat him with kindness and sympathy and sincerely endeavour to understand him and appreciate him. It is often said that the Indian should make the first move. But this is impossible because, as of right, the first move is the superior's. When a subject goes to a Raja, it is the Raja's right to recognise him and speak to him first; it would be unpardonable presumption on the

subject's part to make a familiar approach. That is Indian etiquette and cannot be over-ruled when Indians are concerned. That the Englishman has not made such approach and understood the Indian rightly yet, is patent from the fear and suspicion which he has now evinced. There is absolutely no room for fear and with kind treatment the Indian will remain a British subject for centuries to come. For the matter of that, he will remain so probably under any treatment; but he will shew pleasure and pride in being so, if treated kindly.

There is also another side to this question: if the Englishman treats the Indian kindly and with sympathy and wins his confidence, regard and friendship, he could effect in a generation more social and religious reform among the Indians, than they themselves could hope to do in a century. Love and sympathy are stronger than everything else in this world and no nation has ever yet proved the efficacy of a retrograde policy.

Chapter the Seventeenth.

WHICH RELATES HOW THE SEEDS OF DISCONTENT WERE SOWN.

SO, as time passed by, I became more and more one of the world and not merely one in it and lived my life, in ease and comfort, eager for its little joys and triumphs, often mistaking the rustic cackle of my pool for the world's great clamour, and indifferent to the higher purposes and destinies of earthly existence. One of my Oracles had said: "We do not know, we cannot say, whether death is a wall or a door, the beginning or end of a life." That was my belief too, and if I inclined to anything more positive, I thought that death was more likely a wall and the end of a life than anything else. It is true that my 'principles' and the theory of the greatest happiness of the greatest number and the law of the survival of the fittest did not equip me with a consistent and rational ethical code for daily life; but my principles and practice had long ago shook hands and parted company and I was now a creature of impulses and some long habits, who could not always account reasonably for his conduct. If I was a truer husband, a kinder father, a steadier friend, or a better citizen, on the whole, than some of my fellowmen, it was not because I was a saint on principle and con-

viction, but merely owing perhaps to a softer heart and a more feeling nature. I was indeed a Satan or a Beelzebub in Pandemonium when compared with the great ideal of my youthful dreams; perhaps it was even worse with me, for I did not fully realise the depth of my degradation or feel restless and dissatisfied with my fallen state.

I was always fond of books and when Reynolds was discarded, Scott, Thackeray, Dickens and George Eliot took his place. Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* and Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia* were my greatest and earliest favourites. Carlyle pulled down all the masks and showy encumbrances of rank and power and made me realise how one touch of nature made the whole world kin. The emperor on the dazzling throne, surrounded by all the pride, pomp and circumstance of glorious royalty, was no better by virtue of his mere position, than the low-caste scavenger who swept the streets. The rank was but the outward stamp, the man was the gold that determined the true worth of the coin. The other book assumed this great fact and then shewed the way to real happiness in this world, the divine path of self-sacrifice. Love and willing sacrifice alone secured happiness, not wealth, nor rank, nor power, nor anything else; these were indeed

obstacles and yielded happiness only when they were sacrificed for the sake of others. This great truth was impressed upon my mind deeper and deeper with each fresh perusal of the noble poem and I grew less and less content with the life I was leading. This altruistic impulse often made me moody and miserable and I sometimes imagined it would make me mad. My materialism was very much shaken and certainly did not shine brighter for the shaking. Grave doubts as to its infallibility began to haunt my mind; and once the spell was broken, its power over me waned very rapidly.

At this juncture, I came across that "epoch-making" book *Robert Elsmere*, a copy of which I purchased at a book-stall, attracted by its melodious title. The first few pages were rather dull, but I was soon absorbed in its contents and can never forget the feverish heat with which I ran through it in one night. I read it again and again and pondered over its noble ideas. I became utterly dissatisfied with the life I was living and keenly remorseful for the precious years I had wasted in barren scepticism and doubt. My hero too was a sceptic in the eyes of popular religion but his was a heart full of noble ideas and sympathy for humanity and his was a mind of infinite steadiness, strength and fervour;

above all, he had immense faith in the power of knowledge and good works. My view of life was entirely different: I was sceptical not merely of all religious tenets and beliefs, but even of the very foundations of ethics and morality. My doubt was radical and all-devouring. While the noble example portrayed in the book fascinated my attention and in a way inclined my heart towards such an ideal of life, the greatest benefit I directly derived from it was this: it made it almost impossible for me to lead any longer a life of hypocrisy, a life in which the daily actions and the most sincere beliefs and convictions were as far apart as possible. Such a life became altogether unbearable and handing over my cases to a fellow-pleader and temporarily closing my office and sending away my family to my village, I started on a tour, all alone, to think out the problem for myself at leisure.

Chapter the Eighteenth.

WHICH NARRATES THE JOURNEY IN SEARCH OF PEACE.

MY scepticism, though generally innocent and passive, was sometimes aggressive. When I visited any famous shrine in the company of friends or out of curiosity during festivals, while all around me were absorbed in deep devotion and in adoring the formless one symbolised in the sacred image, the amazing stupidity of it all would sometimes flash on my mind suddenly and I would be seized with an irresistible impulse to enter the shrine and shatter the hideous-looking idol to pieces and thus prove the imbecility of their worship. On such mad occasions, I used to leave the temple hastily and go away as far from it as I considered necessary. When my materialism was found no longer self-sufficient and when my heart grew dissatisfied with Spencer's intellectually proved 'unknowable,' I began to regret I was not richer in faith and poorer in iconoclastic reason. The words of the great sage Thayumanavar came again and again to my mind: "The good are the unlearned alone; yes, they alone are good. What shall I say of my deeds and my reason, who am learnèd and yet unwise? If one ably advocate wise meditation,

I reply that action is more important; if another advocate action, I argue that wise meditation is better. To a scholar in Sanskrit, I display my knowledge in Tamil; and before a Tamil scholar, I speak some Sanskrit words. Alas! Will this learning that enables me only to browbeat and perplex others, ever give me salvation? There is no benefit in clever speech; therefore grant me the boon of silence, O Thou Absolute and Supreme Being! Thou Infinite Glory! Thou Ocean of Bliss."

Before starting on my curious journey, I had written of my perplexity and discontent to some gentlemen who, I thought, could give me useful advice. Their replies reached me at the first big town I halted in. One advised me to read the Christian Gospels and Thomas â Kempis' famous book; two others opined that a study of the *Bhagavat Gita* alone could set my heart at rest; while the fourth, my uncle, advised me to spend more time in sleep and bodily exercise, to place myself under expert medical treatment if necessary, and to read Ingersoll's pamphlets again carefully. All my advisers were unanimous in this, that each recommended his own religion. So I concluded that religion was my remedy and I found only then how little I knew of any of the great religions of the world. I then proceeded

direct to Madras and engaging a small, but retired and comfortable lodging, procured the best books on the four great religions of the world and commenced their earnest study. I firmly believe that a real *Bhakta*[1] like a poet, is born, not made. All the books I studied did not make me more devout or credulous. But at the end of my study, my mind was almost peaceful. The same ethics was preached in all the scriptures and all of them alike recognised the great mystery behind the veil. But in clearing this mystery they differed, in that their *Avatars* or god-men were not all alike. Mahomedanism did not appeal much to me, though it was the latest religion and should have profited by all the rest that went before it. Buddhism seemed to me to be the most noble and the most humane. Christianity, especially the sermon on the mount, came next, in its power of appealing to human sympathies; but it was badly handicapped by a narrow interpretation and an indiscriminating claim to wholesale revelation. Further, like Buddhism, its ethics was not literally practicable to any individual or nation desiring material prosperity and worldly success. While Christ taught his disciples to love their enemies and to show their left cheek if they were beaten

[1] A pious and devout person. Ed.

on the right one, the national anthem of the most Christian nation in the world prayed to the very God "to arise and scatter their enemies and make them fall" and all the Christian nationalities vied with each other in expanding their armies and perfecting the instruments of destruction and death. Perhaps, national religion should confine itself to guiding and supervising the conduct of men in ordinary affairs not within the province of law or public opinion, or in addition to and co-operating with these; while the higher purposes of pure religion should be left entirely to individual inclinations and longings. Coming to the Hindu religion, the more I read of it and observed it in practice around me, the more I was astonished at its infinite variety and comprehensiveness. It seemed to provide for every stage of humanity, from the savage to the saint. It was, as it were, a religion on a sliding scale which you could adjust to anything. It ascended from the grossest fetichism to the most sublime and subtle metaphysics. It was not indeed one religion, preached or expounded at any one time, by any one person, god or man; it consisted of innumerable relics of a great and ancient civilization, extending over vast centuries of progress and decay. My quest was not to unravel the great mystery or draw the veil off the unknowable.

I only wanted some principle to guide me in daily life, a rudder to my bark which would not appear monstrous to my reason. And this I found in that most amazing and perplexing book, the *Bhagavat Gita.* George Eliot has said: "A philosopher is the last sort of animal I should like to be; I find it enough to live, without inventing lies to account for life;" and I was of the same opinion. Do thy duty and do it with utter indifference to the fruits of action, preached the *Gita* in one place and I felt that would ensure peace of mind. Theosophical literature also formed a portion of my studies and mostly through its means, I was convinced, as far as conviction was possible in such a subject, of the truth of the doctrines of Reincarnation and Karma. So far I had become richer in faith or duller in reason and the result was not restlessness but peacefulness of mind. I returned to my work, and in my belief, a better and a wiser man than when I left it.[1]

As was only natural, the daily acting out of the simple rule of life was much more difficult than its enunciation. Doubts and fears obstructed

[1] As my friend has omitted all mention of the details of his further religious studies and practices, I shall here merely note that he latterly became a great practical Vedantin and Yogi; and by some at least, his early death was attributed to his yoga practices. Ed.

at every step, while long established habits and vehement desires pulled in the opposite direction. But with the overcoming of each obstacle and the over-ruling of each desire, the mind grew more strong and more self-confident and the promptings of the Higher Conscience were always clear and powerful. The simple and doubtless lives of such illiterate but good persons like my wife, furnished me with valuable object-lessons. We do not progress only as long as we think we are perfect; once the defects are recognised and an earnest desire to mend them arises in the heart, we are helped on in the least expected manner and the way is pleasant and easy.

Chapter the Nineteenth.

WHICH SPEAKS OF MY UNCLE.

THERE remains little more to record of my uneventful life.

Since my uncle has figured in these pages so largely, I shall narrate here his sad fate. After his apprentice course, he entered the service of the Government in the engineering department. That department, with its great temptations, was one of the most corrupt branches of the state-service. With characteristic want of principles and expensive and vicious habits, my uncle soon became one of the most corrupt officers even in that service and lived almost like a prince on a salary which would not have been enough to feed a couple of horses. Far away from his own District and little known where he was, he set at naught all public opinion and lived in the most un-Brahminical manner. He smoked, drank, and dined openly with non-Brahmins and such Eurasians as chose to associate with him, became more familiar with the language of Billingsgate than with the Vedas, always dressed in European costume, including even the hat sometimes, was loudly proud of his atheism and vituperative towards his countrymen, referring to them as 'd—d dirty niggers,' and was never more pleased

than when he was once mistaken by a fellow-passenger for a Eurasian, in a railway carriage. His wife was a handsome little thing, of whom, with all his loose morals, he was rather fond; and he compelled her to dress in petticoat, jacket and *sari*, and go about with him and freely move in male company. It was amazing how bold and audacious the shy and retiring girl became in a short time under his training. They never visited any of our relatives and none of them ever cared to go to them. The catastrophe was not long in coming. With all his new-fangled ideas, my uncle was an Indian at heart and he was really as jealous of his wife as he was himself low in morals. He had a handsome Naidu[1] youth who acted as his valet and private secretary and this fellow was a veritable Cassio in his own way. It appears that one day my uncle's wife playfully related to him a dream she dreamt of her moving too familiarly with this Naidu servant. She was quite innocent, the poor girl; but, my uncle's jealousy was at once aroused and his quick imagination misinterpreted everything for him. He soon decided how to act; he was Cæsar and his wife should be above suspicion and as she had presumably betrayed him, he would get

[1] A branch of the Sudra caste. Ed.

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the penalty from her. He proposed to her a visit to Madras to purchase some diamond jewels for her. She was only too glad and so they went and he purchased for her some valuable jewels. On their return journey, they halted at a strange out-of-the-way village where there was a famous temple. Cholera was then prevalent there. Poor Rengam was suddenly attacked with cholera; a telegram was despatched to her father; in a couple of hours more another telegram was sent that she was dead. It was a nine days' wonder in the village how a strange gentleman came with his wife on a visit to the shrine, how his beautiful wife died there suddenly of cholera and how he went away in a few hours, an inconsolable husband, after cremating her body. Arsenic is indeed a powerful poison.

My uncle did not long survive this foul murder. His wicked habits were very costly and to find funds for them, he grew more and more extortionate. Complaints went up and an officer of high rank was deputed to enquire into them. With dismissal, disgrace and penury staring at him, my uncle suddenly quitted the world by shooting himself with a revolver. May his wretched and misguided soul find more peace elsewhere!

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